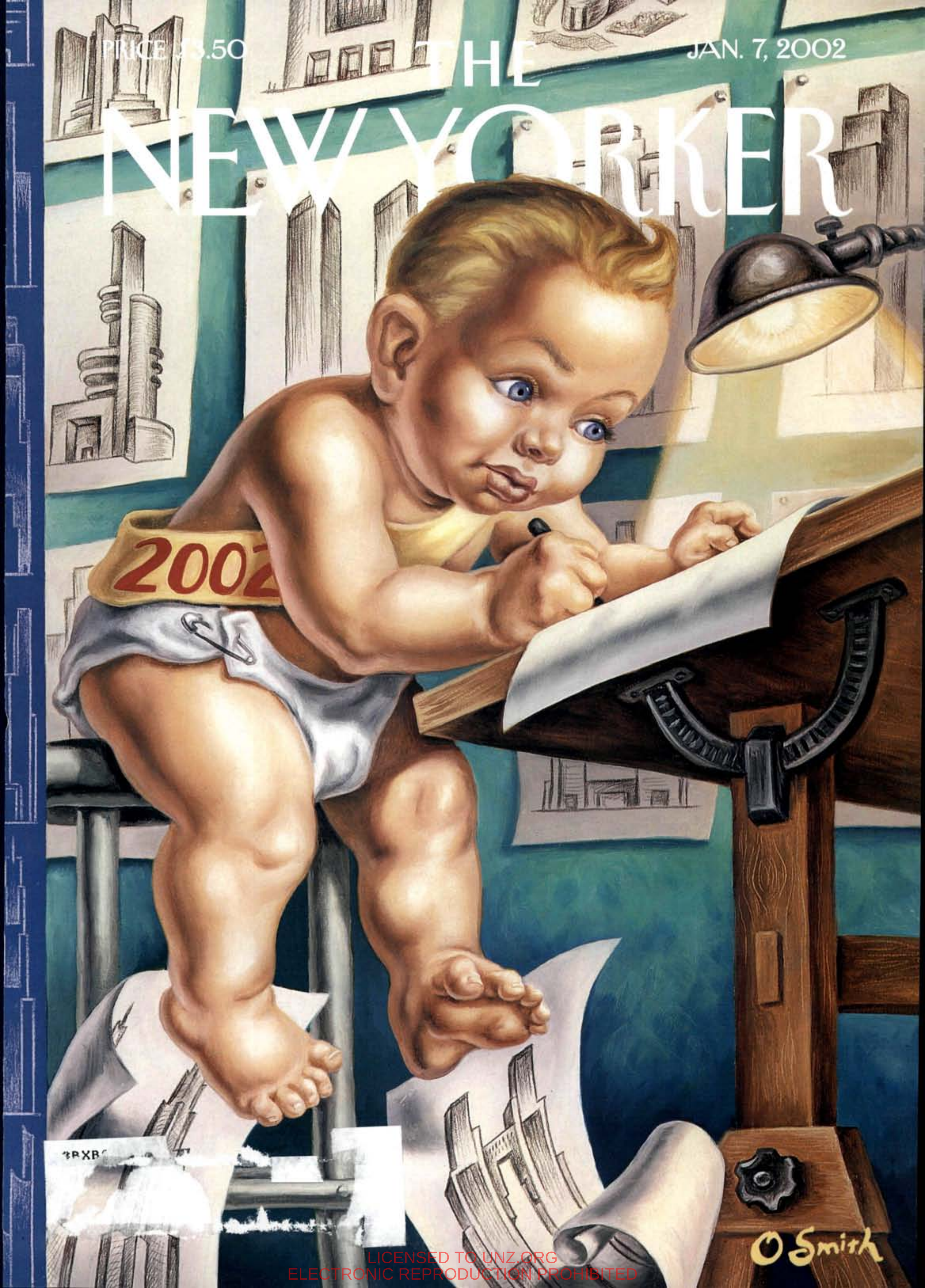
PRICE $3.50

THE NEW YORKER

JAN. 7, 2002


2002
O Smith

THE LEXUS GS 430

Now we are not implying that the Lexus GS 430 is the perfect vehicle in which to achieve existential happiness.

On the other hand, it is arguably one of the most balanced sport sedans ever made.

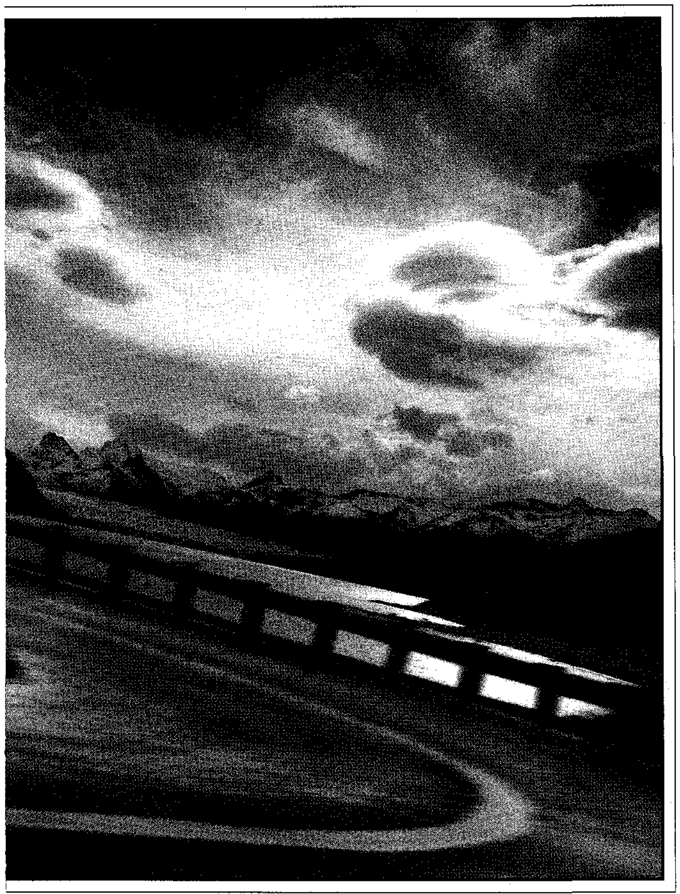
A cursory glance at the numbers is enough to awaken the most dour of souls: 4.3 liters, 32 valves, 300 horsepower and, remarkably, 325 pound-feet of torque.

Such prodigious output is made possible by our aptly named Variable Valve Timing with intelligence (VVT-i for short) that increases response at low and medium rpm's. So when you punch the accelerator, things happen with a sense of urgency that you'll simply not experience elsewhere. Time compresses. Landscapes blur. Joy nears.

Perhaps more amazing than the sheer

ULTRA-LOW
EMISSIONS FOR
KARMA.
300 HORSEPOWER FOR
NIRVANA.

*California Air Resources Board certified as U-LEV. For more information about the certification process and criteria, please visit www.arb.ca.gov. ©2001 Lexus, a Division of Toyota Motor



power this car produces is the civility with which it is wielded. The GS 430 ride feels smooth and composed, while its handling borders on being telepathic.

Interestingly enough, the same system providing this power is largely accountable for its rarefied U-LEV* status.

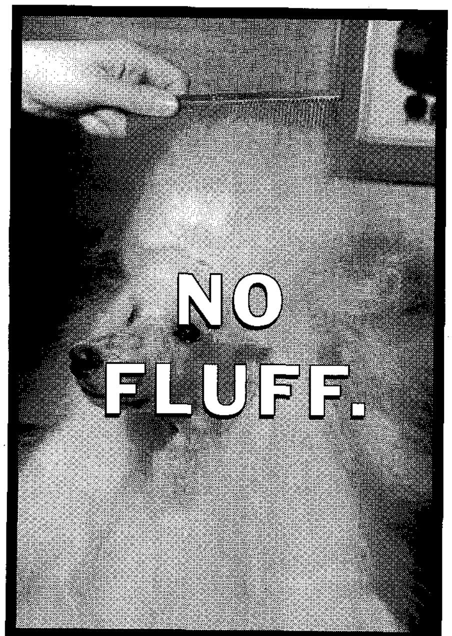
What good, after all, is creating one of the most exhilarating cars on the planet if there's no planet left to drive on?

So what on earth is U-LEV? Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle — a rating recognized by the EPA and the California Air Resources Board with the intent of reducing harmful emissions. In order to achieve this government rating, an automobile must emit one-third less harmful emissions than the average new car being sold today. How did Lexus engineer this masterstroke? An ingenious catalytic converter design. Unique induction technology. And production tolerances as precise and tight as you could possibly imagine. The end result of all of this innovation and technology is a powerful engine that runs exceptionally cleanly and efficiently. Because at Lexus, we firmly believe that a true performance automobile should not only be driven responsibly, it should be built responsibly, too.

Can an automobile delight, comfort, fascinate and energize you?
Take lexus.com for a test drive. The Passionate Pursuit of Perfection.

LEXUS

Sales, U.S.A., Inc. Lexus reminds you to wear seatbelts, secure children in rear seat, obey all speed laws and drive responsibly. For more information, call 800-USA-LEXUS (800-872-5398).



We don't carry tacky titles, vapid volumes or used and abused books.

At Daedalus, we don't sell just any remainder books. Our books have substance, style, character and content. We offer titles that inform, amuse, enlighten and enrich. There are former bestsellers. Much-admired authors. Specialty volumes. Boxed sets. Even signed first editions. All brand new. All up to 90% off.

Exactly what are remainders? They're "surplus" books. The difference between what a publisher prints, and what gets sold. Daedalus sells the best of them at less than half the list price. So call today for your free catalog. Or visit our Web site and order online. Don't brush-off these great discounts.

daedalusbooks.com

You can also find us at
salebooks.com

Bargain Books At Up To 90% Off

For a free catalog call
1-800-395-2665

THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 7, 2002

6 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
19 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
What Muslim women want; rating G.M.

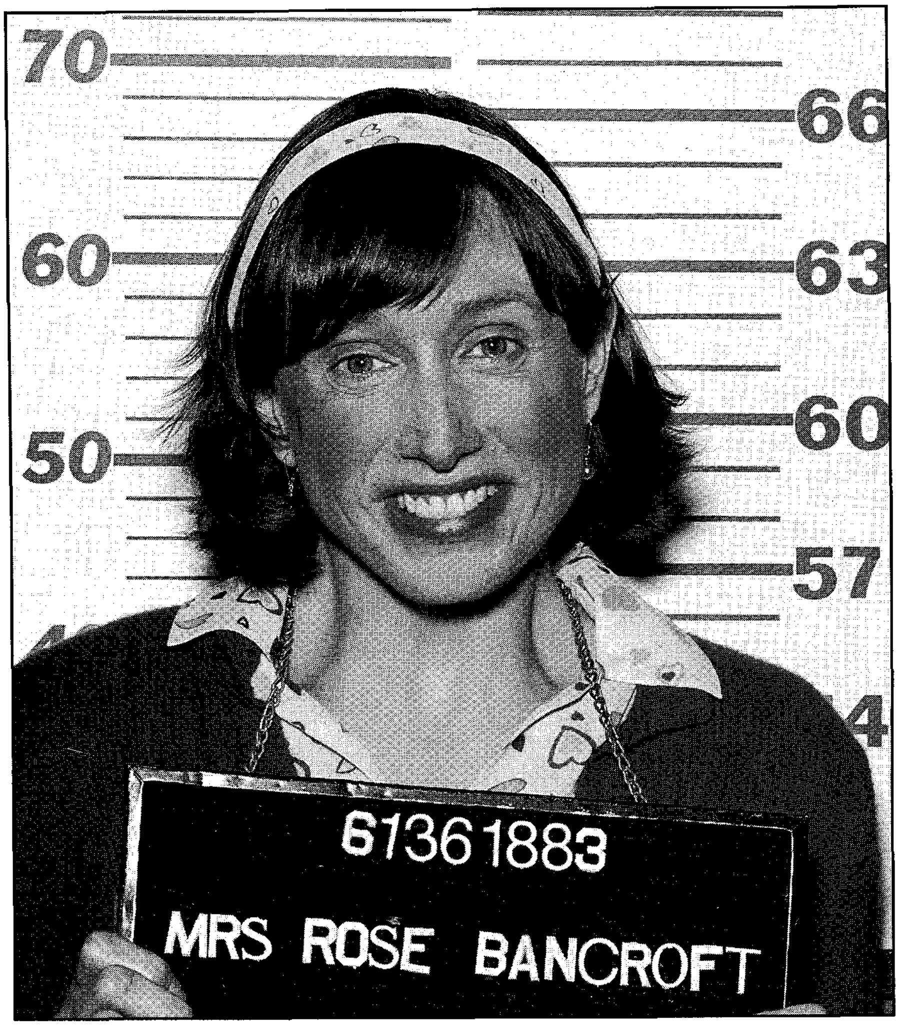
Mark Singer 24 U.S. JOURNAL
Who Killed Carol Jenkins?
Race and death in a small town.
Andy Borowitz 29 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Theatre-Lobby Notices
Elizabeth Kolbert 30 ANNALS OF SCIENCE
Ice Memory
Is a warning hidden in Greenland's glacier?
Francine du Plessix Gray 38 LIFE AND LETTERS
Mayakovsky's Last Loves
The poet, his muse, and the beautiful émigrée.
David Remnick 56 LETTER FROM JERUSALEM
The Dreamer
Can Shimon Peres make peace between Yasir Arafat and Ariel Sharon?
David Schickler 64 FICTION
"Jamaica"

THE CRITICS
BOOKS
Joan Acocella 72 *The novels of Italo Svevo.*
79 Briefly Noted
Alex Ross 80 MUSICAL EVENTS
Strauss's "Die Frau Ohne Schatten."
Anthony Lane 82 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"A Beautiful Mind."

POEMS
Linda Gregg 36 "Elegance"
Charles Simic 59 "The Secret Doctrine"

COVER *"New Year's Resolutions," by Owen Smith* THE BACK PAGE *"The Justice Department's Expanded Powers Improve the Quality of Life," by Steve Brodner* DRAWINGS *J. B. Handelsman, Mick Stevens, Charles Barsotti, Sam Gross, Pat Byrnes, Jack Ziegler, Bruce Eric Kaplan, William Haefeli, Leo Cullum, Roz Chast, Edward Koren, P. C. Vey, Michael Crawford, David Sipress, Michael Maslin, Alex Gregory, Gahan Wilson*

www.newyorker.com



YOU'RE PROTECTED AGAINST HACKERS, VIRUSES AND WORMS.
BUT WHAT ABOUT ROSE IN BENEFITS?

*e*Trust™ Security Solutions
Complete protection for your entire enterprise.

When it comes to protecting your business, you need security that can protect your enterprise from potential threats, no matter where they may come from. That's exactly what *e*Trust does. Our family of products allows you to not only safeguard your entire enterprise, but also view and manage that security either centrally or from multiple delegated locations. So you can continue to grow and maximize new opportunities while minimizing your risk. And that's security you can feel secure about.

ca
Computer **Associates**™

HELLO TOMORROW™ | WE ARE COMPUTER ASSOCIATES | THE SOFTWARE THAT MANAGES *e*BUSINESS™ ca.com/etrust

©2001 Computer Associates International, Inc. (CA). All trademarks, trade names, service marks, and logos referenced herein belong to their respective companies.

THE NEW YORKER ONLINE

www.newyorker.com

September 11th and Its Aftermath

PLUS: Dozens of Web exclusives featuring *New Yorker* authors and artists, including

Jonathan Franzen
W. G. Sebald
Edward Koren
Eavan Boland
John Cassidy
Art Spiegelman
Pauline Kael
V. S. Naipaul
Gilles Peress
Malcolm Gladwell
Philip Gourevitch
Paula Fox
Louis Menand
Rebecca Mead
E. L. Doctorow
Barry Blitt
Lillian Ross
Ken Auletta
Nicholas Lemann
Alice Munro
Elizabeth Kolbert
and more

AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

CONTRIBUTORS

Mark Singer ("Who Killed Carol Jenkins?," p. 24) has been writing for the magazine since 1974. He has published three books: "Funny Money," "Mr. Personality," and "Citizen K."

Elizabeth Kolbert ("Ice Memory," p. 30) is a staff writer.

David Schickler (Fiction, p. 64) published his first collection of short stories, "Kissing in Manhattan," in June. He is adapting several of the stories for a screenplay.

Rebecca Mead (Comment, p. 19) has been a staff writer since 1997.

Andy Borowitz (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 29) is a humorist. His books are "Rationalizations to Live By" and "The Trillionaire Next Door."

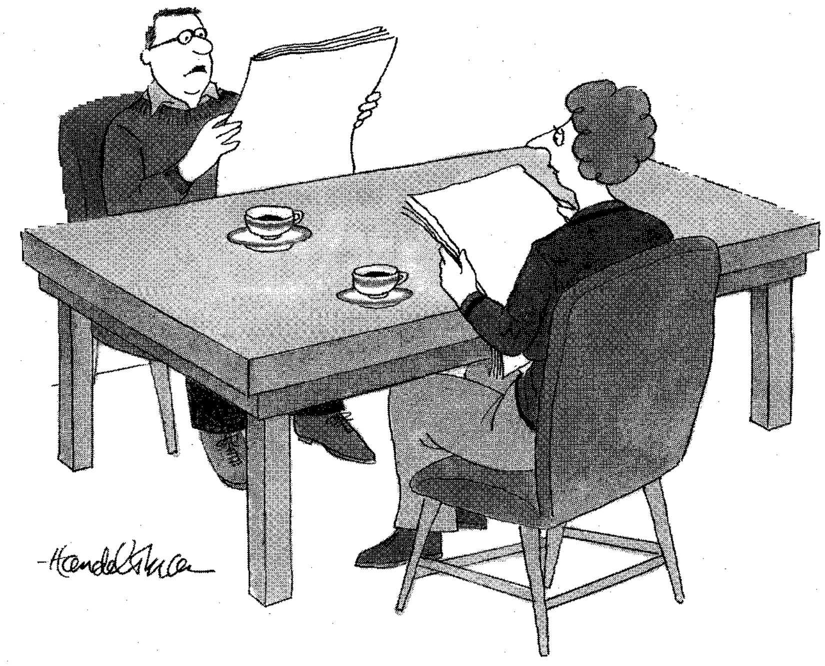
Francine du Plessix Gray ("Mayakovsky's Last Loves," p. 38) is the author of "Soviet Women" and, most recently, "Simone Weil." She has been contributing to the magazine since 1967.

Linda Gregg (Poem, p. 36) has written five books of poetry, including "Too Bright to See," "Alma," and "Things and Flesh."

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 72) is a staff writer who reviews books and dance for the magazine.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 80) is *The New Yorker's* music critic.

Steve Brodner (The Back Page, p. 84) is a caricaturist and a documentary filmmaker. He has been a contributor to the magazine since 1993. ♦



"I'm really going to miss getting steamed at Anthony Lewis."

THE NEW YORKER, 4 Times Square, N.Y., N.Y. 10036-6592. David Carey, vice-president and publisher; Chris Mitchell, associate publisher; Peter W. Jurew, associate publisher, marketing; Marie Wolpert, advertising manager; Joyce Castleberry, New York manager; Ronda Carnegie, sales development director; Peter Zuckerman, national sales manager; Susan Harrington, director of creative services; Louis Montesano, director of marketing and strategic planning; Theresa Gaffney, creative development director; Rosemary Stanton, advertising business director. For advertising inquiries, please call Marie Wolpert at (212) 286-5611. The New Yorker is unable to accept unsolicited submissions at this time, and is not responsible for the return or loss of submissions, or for any damage or other injury to unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. © 2001 by The Condé Nast Publications Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The periodical's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc., published through its division The Condé Nast Publications Inc. S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Steven T. Florio, president and C.E.O.; Charles H. Townsend, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.F.O.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: To inquire about a subscription or to change an address, please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037-0684, telephone (800) 825-2510, E-mail to subscriptions@newyorker.com, or visit our Web site at www.newyorker.com. To purchase a back issue telephone (800) 825-2510. Outside North America, call (515) 243-3273. For a change of address, subscribers should give four weeks' notice. If possible, please send the address label from a recent issue. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037-0684.

THE MAIL

THE VANISHING SHIRE

Anthony Lane, in his review of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, remarks on its allure for children—especially boys, who "keep looking over their shoulder at the vanishing Shire" (A Critic at Large, December 10th). The books are, at heart, about dying and about leaving adolescence. Tolkien emphasizes again and again the nature of time—that the Third Age is passing in Middle-earth, that magic will vanish. At the end, Frodo is wounded and demoralized, and when he returns there is no Shire left. Tolkien's message is clear: you can't go home again, so just do the right thing anyway. After the first volume was published, in 1954, a *Times* critic noted, "This is not for children." That warning is still apt.

Mark Gauvreau Judge
Potomac, Md.

Lane recalls the appeal that the heft of the one-volume compendium of "The Lord of the Rings" had for him as a child, and how the number of pages—a thousand and seventy-seven—"itself was like a spell." The bibliographical irony is that Tolkien never wanted his masterpiece (twelve years in the making) to appear in three volumes. It was essentially a sales decision: Allen & Unwin despaired of selling a seventy-shilling book in London's depressed postwar economy. And there was another problem, one familiar to many writers: Tolkien was about a year late in submitting his revisions.

Guy Lesser
Brooklyn, N.Y.

OIL POOR

James Surowiecki cites just a few developing nations that have evaded the "resource curse" that supposedly breeds economic laziness in oil-rich lands (The Talk of the Town, December 3rd). There is a more powerful counterexample: the United States. Our nation was the world's first oil power, but that didn't bankrupt us. Part of the reason is that, by the time of the eighteen-seventies oil boom, the U.S. had a tradition of manufacturing and entrepreneurship. Oil wasn't seen as the only path to riches. So Thomas Edison stayed in New Jersey to be an inventor rather than move to Pennsylvania to be a wildcatter. On the other hand, oil revenues fuelled growth. At the right time and place, the oil curse is no curse at all.

Loren Fox
New York City

Surowiecki writes that, since "Saudi Arabia is flush with natural-resource money, everything in that country becomes more expensive, including labor. It's difficult to open, say, a factory to make khakis for the Gap, because the khakis would be too expensive to compete." Annual incomes in Saudi Arabia average $6,900. How low should they go? This is a recipe not for growth but for indentured servitude. Lowering living standards to foster competition has not worked for most of the planet. The race to the bottom may be on, but let's not stand by and cheer.

Mike Raine
Saskatoon, Sask., Canada

WHO OWNS TELEVISION?

It may be, as Ken Auletta reports, that the networks face a choice between foreign news and the bottom line ("Battle Stations," December 10th). But they do not operate in a pure capitalist bubble: they lease the airwaves—which are owned by the public—on highly favorable terms and, in return, are held to certain standards. They owe us. But when news divisions are held to the same corporate discipline that entertainment divisions are, the public pays. No one begrudges them a profit, but not at our expense.

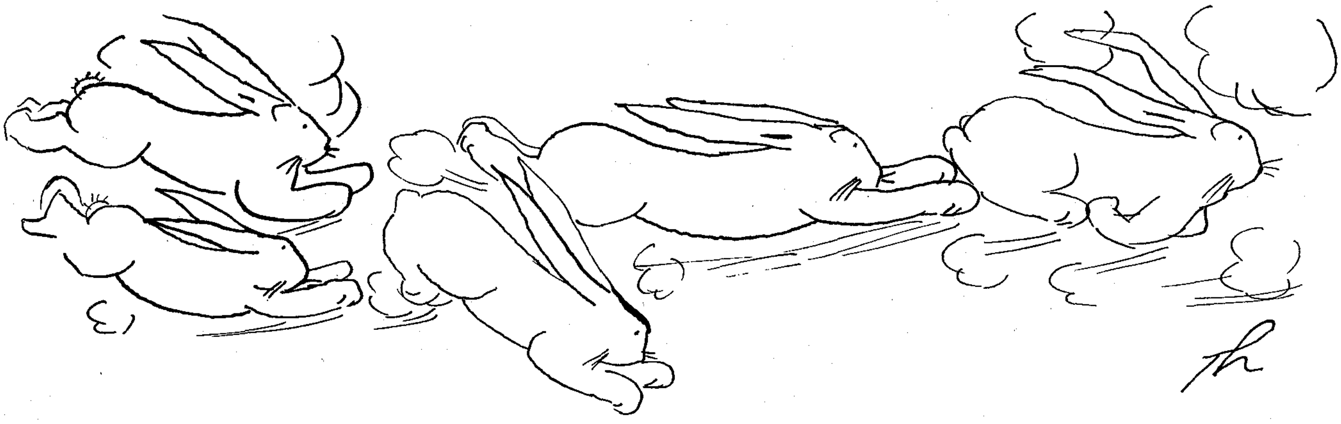
Jason Carey
Brooklyn, N.Y.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

For Your Consideration
Best Actress
Tilda Swinton
"The glory of the picture is the magnificent Tilda Swinton."
Elvis Mitchell, THE NEW YORK TIMES
THE DEEP END
FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES
Best Supporting Actor
Ben Kingsley
"Ben Kingsley's performance jolts the movie like an exposed high-voltage wire."
A.O. Scott, THE NEW YORK TIMES
SEXY BEAST
FOX SEARCHLIGHT

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



JAMES THURBER, 8/26/39

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BRUTAL IMAGINATION
The playwright Cornelius Eady and the composer Diedre Murray's latest collaboration concerns the notorious case of Susan Smith, who in order to cover her own crime of murder claimed an unknown black man had abducted her children. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

ECCO PORCO
A persecuted pig is the focus of the latest show from the interdisciplinary troupe Mabou Mines, written by Lee Breuer and starring Ruth Maleczech and Frederick Neumann. Opens Jan. 3 at 7. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

HOBSON'S CHOICE
An Atlantic Theatre Company revival of Harold Brighouse's 1915 play, starring David Aaron Baker, Brian Murray, and Martha Plimpton. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

MARIA DEL BOSCO
(SEX & RACING CARS: A SOUND OPERA)
The avant-garde playwright Richard Foreman's fiftieth play. In previews. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

MOSTLY SONDHEIM
In her one-woman show, Barbara Cook performs the songs of Stephen Sondheim, as well as songs by his favorite composers. Sundays and Mondays at 7:30. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

TAPE
Naked Angels presents Stephen Belber's play about three high-school friends who reunite in an East Lansing motel room. Geoffrey Nauffts is the director. Previews begin Jan. 8. (José Quintero, 534 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

WHY CLEANING FAILS
In her latest play, Deb Margolin investigates the tyranny of housekeeping. Jan. 4-6 at 7:30. Continues through Jan. 13. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

OPENED RECENTLY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			2	3	4	5
6	7	8				

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES
In this encore production, the quintuple threat Rinde Eckert (writer, composer, actor, singer, dancer), looking like a demented genius harnessed to a tape recorder, plays a composer who is desperate to finish his opera, based on "Moby-Dick," before his memory gives out. The composer and his muse (Nora Cole), who wears a red whalebone corset and turns out to be a bit of a siren, act out scenes from the work, which promises to be fine and harrowing—Queequeg's song, hornpipes, Ahab's entrance. Inevitably, though, it runs adrift, as if the composer had embarked on one of Melville's grand digressions and lost the thread. (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983. Closes Jan. 13.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE OF DEATH
Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen square off in Strindberg's depiction of the blasted heath of matrimony, and they do battle magnificently. Mirren, playing a former actress (if there is such a thing as a former actress), is droll and wicked, and McKellen, in his deep embrace of the role of an army captain who comes face to face with his own mortality, is a life force. Directed by Sean Mathias. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/22/01.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 13.)

EVERETT BEEKIN
Richard Greenberg's play enacts one family's journey from the gritty sidewalks of the Lower East Side in the nineteen-forties to the bland promised land of California in the nineties. Along the way, much is lost, and Greenberg is articulate in evoking a melancholy that goes beyond words, as he was in his masterly "Three Days of Rain" a few years ago. But this time the work doesn't cut as deep—it's a portrait of devastation done in pastels instead of oils. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 6.)

45 SECONDS FROM BROADWAY
Neil Simon is in his element in his new comedy, which is part love letter, part elegy to a Broadway that ain't what it used to be. It's set in the legendary coffee shop of the Edison Hotel, in the heart of the theatre district, and while Simon has the dynamics of the place right the humor here is superficial and stale—it's canned chicken soup whose expiration date has long passed. (11/26/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

GOOD THING
The New Group presents a drama by Jessica Goldberg, in which a young woman's attempt to recapture her past jeopardizes the lives of two couples. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 13.)

HEDDA GABLER
This "Hedda," starring Kate Burton, is all surface brightness—it twinkles rather than burns. Jon Robin Baitz's colloquial adaptation of Ibsen's drama leaves little room for shading or depth, and the entire cast suffers under Nicholas Martin's heavy-handed and misguided direction, as does the audience. (10/22/01) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 13.)

HOMEBODY/KABUL
Tony Kushner's latest play, set in London and in Kabul in 1998, about a woman who becomes obsessed with Afghanistan. Declan Donnellan is the director. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

MAMMA MIA!
This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between the band's No. 1 singles. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARC SALEM'S MIND GAMES, TOO
Save the cash you were planning to spend on that psychic and instead purchase ninety minutes with the "mentalist and mind artist" Marc Salem, who claims that his highly entertaining act is both hocus-pocusless (anyone can do it, he claims—if they study the human mind for thirty years) and scamless (he offers $100,000 to anyone who discovers a wire). He'll make no promises about your future; the fun comes from the fact that his fascinating "tricks" seem like magic and from trying to figure out how in the world he does them. At times you feel like you're the only person in the audience who isn't a plant. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

NOISES OFF
Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. Frayn's construction requires spot-on comic timing, and with the help of Sams this production delivers it—and then some. The laughs rumble through the audience from start to finish. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and

David (Friendy) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY
"A little coitus / Never hoit us," John Leguizamo jokes in his third one-man Broadway show, a crowd-pleasing hip-hop account of sexual escapades. Starting with the wacky impoverishment of his Colombian-Puerto Rican childhood and ending with proud parenthood as the father of two "Jewricans," Leguizamo is noisy, funny, inventive, and sweet. He brings new sounds, new moves, and a new audience to the Great White Way. (He even dances in the aisles.) Next time, though, he'd do well to bring new material, too. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE SHAPE OF THINGS
Gretchen Mol, Paul Rudd, Rachel Weisz, and Frederick Weller are in the cast of the Almeida Theatre Company staging of Neil LaBute's latest play. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

[SIC]
Three struggling downtown twentysomethings live on the same floor in cubicles trying to pass as apartments, where they sidle around each other emotionally as well as physically. The thirty-six-year-old playwright Melissa James Gibson gives them a steady, if disjointed torrent of clever things to say, with a lot of self-consciously odd rhythmic pauses built in. But Pinter it's not. When the characters stop their noisy self-absorption long enough to eavesdrop on the troubled couple in the large apartment below (an intriguing bit of stage design by Louisa Thompson), it turns out there's a better play going on down there. Directed by Daniel Aukin, the acting is good, especially by James Urbaniak, whose wry projection wrings the most out of his lines. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 206-1515. Closes Jan. 22.)

SPEAKING IN TONGUES
In the terrifically engaging opening scene of Andrew Bovell's play, in which four characters are talking almost simultaneously, no one is possessed and no one is blathering. They are all, however, on the verge of cheating on their spouses. Mark Clements has directed Bovell's fuguelike script with wit and command, so everyone, the audience included, gets the sincere, if desperate, attempt to communicate. After the flashy opening, the playwright's motifs of loneliness, betrayal, and need complicate, interweave, and deepen. Characters only speculated about in Act I become flesh in Act II, others are introduced, one reappears. The players—Karen Allen, Kevin Anderson, Margaret Colin, and Michel R. Gill—have the chops to pull off all nine parts impressively, so every scene delivers an unexpected wrinkle, an unfolding surprise. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 20.)

THE STREETS OF NEW YORK
Charlotte Moore's musical adaptation of the nineteenth-century Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's drama. (Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Jan. 20.)

SUMMER OF '42
A musical adaptation of the 1971 movie, which was based on Herman Raucher's coming-of-age novel of the same title. With a book by Hunter Foster and music and lyrics by David Kirshenbaum. Gabriel Barre is the director and choreographer. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THOU SHALT NOT
The psychological thriller "Thérèse Raquin" was Émile Zola's first experiment in naturalism; this ambitious musical retelling of the novel is an experiment in Expressionism. The director, Susan Stroman, wants dance to be the narrative engine of the musical, but it seems inadequate to the brooding psychology of Zola's lovers, Laurent (the strapping and charismatic Craig Bierko) and Thérèse (Kate Levering). What Zola imagined as the heart's wilderness Stroman and her team re-create as a theme park of self-destruction. (11/5/01) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 6.)

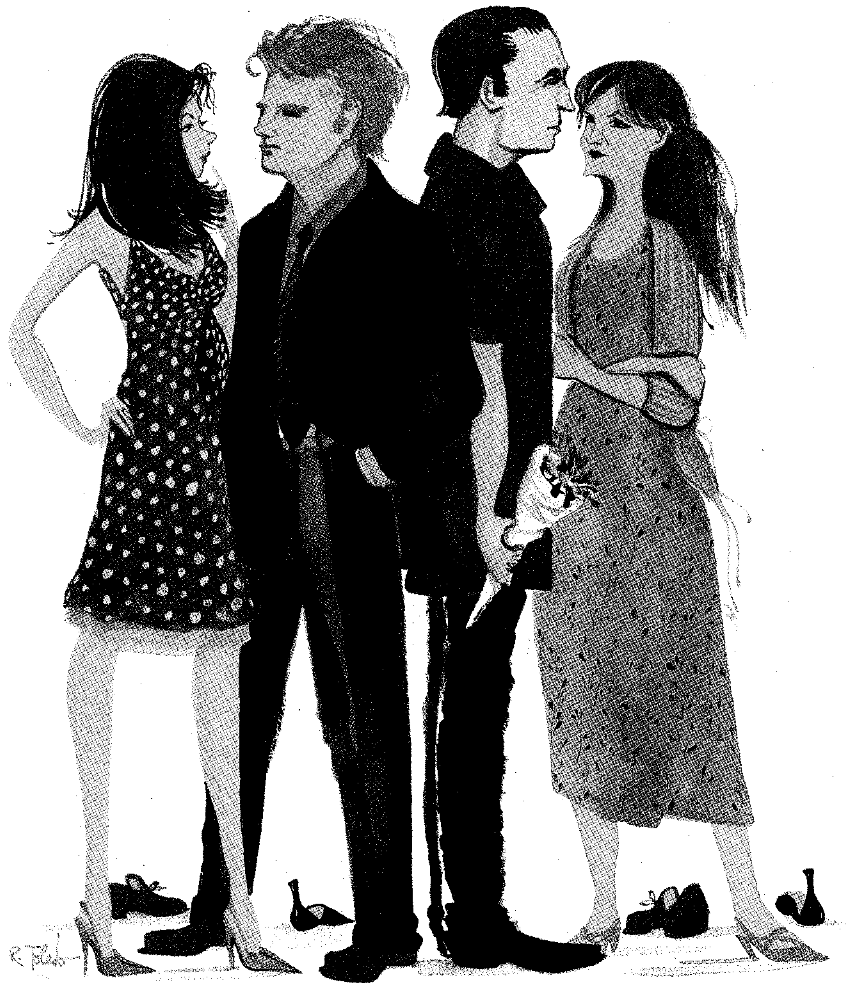
UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
This one-man show, written by Glen Berger and performed by T. Ryder Smith, manages to be both a funny tale of a Dutch librarian's midlife crisis and a serious, intriguing look at the value of any one life. After a book is returned to the library a hundred and thirteen years overdue, the librarian becomes obsessed with finding out how and why. He eventually comes to believe that the Wandering Jew was the errant borrower, whose late return of the volume is one of a series of clues he's left in a desperate attempt to document his existence. As billed, it's "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences." Directed by Randy White. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN
The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE
The Mint Theatre carries on its mission to present worthy but neglected old plays, this time a Keen Company production of the 1943 comedy by John van Druten ("I Am a Camera," "I Remember Mama"). It's a sophisticated love triangle involving two New York actresses and a G.I. awaiting assignment in the early days of the Second World War. The characters are adrift, pursuing fame or fulfillment or a gay old time with no strings attached. It's all informed by the awareness of a dangerous, uncertain future, and the seemingly frothy dialogue packs a surprising resonance. The handsome cast—Elizabeth Bunch, Nick Toren, and Megan Byrne—provide just the right mixture of sweetness, sass, and sincerity. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Jan. 20.)

WHERE'S MY MONEY?
A dark comedy by John Patrick Stanley, about two bush-league divorce lawyers from Brooklyn. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Jan. 13.)

THE WOMEN
Scott Elliott directs a cast that includes Kristen Johnston, Rue McClanahan, Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Tilly, Mary Louise Wilson, and Jennifer Coolidge, in Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 satire. With costumes by Isaac Mizrahi. (11/19/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Jan. 13.)



"Speaking in Tongues," by Andrew Bovell, at the Gramercy Theatre.

RUBEN TOLEDO

WONDER OF THE WORLD
A farcical saga of a manic faux-naïve chatterbox, Cass (the fetching and excellent Sarah Jessica Parker), who goes to Niagara Falls in search of a new life after leaving her husband of seven years, Kip (Alan Tudyk). The playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's soi-disant wacky humor offers no revelations, no admissions, no questions, only startling juxtapositions. The show's one incidental delight is the touching Kevin Chamberlin, as Captain Mike, the Niagara tour-boat guide who falls for Cass. (11/12/01) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Jan. 5.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.
CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.
DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.
THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.
I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.
PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. (Closes Jan. 5.)
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.
THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.
THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.
TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!
Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. (Closes Jan. 6.)
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

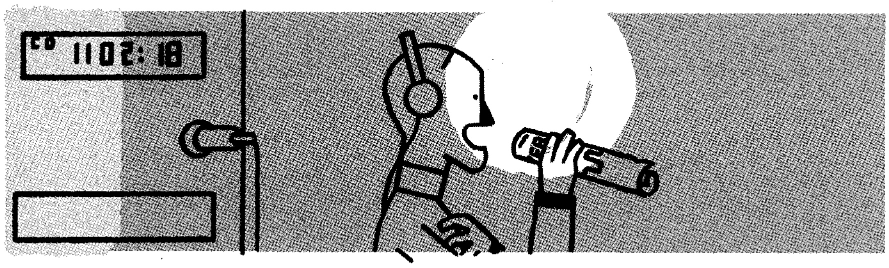
NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Jan. 2 at 8: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Duo Concertant," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Cortège Hongrois." ♦ Jan. 3 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "Symphony in C." ♦ Jan. 4 at 8: "Polyphonia," the première of "Quartet for Strings," choreographed by Peter Martins, and "Symphony in C." ♦ Jan. 5 at 2: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Romeo and Juliet," "Quartet for Strings," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ Jan. 5 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Polyphonia," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ Jan. 6 at 3: "Telemann Overture Suite in E Minor," "Romeo and Juliet," "Quartet for Strings," and "Cortège Hongrois." ♦ Jan. 8 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Polyphonia," and "Cortège Hongrois." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Through Feb. 24.)

"ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT"
The annual festival of contemporary dance. **Paradigm:** Jan. 3 and Jan. 5 at 8 and Jan. 6 at 2. ♦ **Complexions:** Jan. 4 and Jan. 8 at 8, Jan. 5 at 2, and Jan. 6 at 7:30. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

"BORN TO DANCE"
Fred Astaire may have been the most elegant tap dancer onscreen, but Eleanor Powell—his thirties

POP ROUNDUP

Twelve favorites from our 2001 CD rotation.



LAURENT CILLUFFO

"Aaliyah," Aaliyah (Blackground)—The Brooklyn-born singer, Gladys Knight's niece and a protégée of the singer R. Kelly, was one of the brightest stars in R. & B. before her death in a late-summer plane crash. Her third album, "Aaliyah," is also her best, a seductive collection of songs about the perils of womanhood and fame which builds upon the cutting-edge work of such producers as Timbaland without relying on it too heavily.

"Everybody Got Their Something," Nikka Costa (Virgin)—The American début album by Costa, the twenty-eight-year-old daughter of the producer Don Costa, is rich, varied, and powerful, which comes as no surprise given that the singer is already a star in Europe and in her adopted homeland, Australia. "Everybody" is an intoxicating mix of funky rock and roll which is bound together by Costa's powerful and sultry vocals.

"Love and Theft," Bob Dylan (Columbia)—The first album from rock's premier poet since 1997's "Time Out of Mind" doesn't have the gravity or pessimism of its predecessor, and it's not quite as coherent a set of songs. Instead, "Love and Theft" is a supremely confident tour through several decades of American music, from the jazz stylings of "Floater (Too Much to Ask)" to the folk balladry of "Po' Boy" to the rockabilly of "Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum." Dylan himself sounds both relaxed and energized, and his band—anchored by Charlie Sexton and Larry Campbell—continually proves that it is one of the world's best roots-rock outfits.

"Miss E . . . So Addictive," Missy Elliott (Elektra)—The album that gave the world two of this year's biggest hits, the spare, overcaffeinated "Get Ur Freak On" and the comical "One Minute Man," is much better, on the whole, than even those two songs. The third release from the rapper, songwriter, and style icon is a foot-tapping, hip-shaking ride from start to finish. Elliott's long-term producer Timbaland refuses to pad the album with filler, instead making every song count, from the driving hip-hop numbers to the languorous ballads (don't miss the "hidden" pair at the very end of the disk).

"Gorillaz," Gorillaz (Virgin)—This genre-dissolving release from Damon Albarn, the front man for Blur and a onetime savior of Brit pop; Dan (the Automator) Nakamura, the hip-hop impresario; and Jamie Hewlett, the creator of the "Tank Girl" comic strip; is an eclectic collection of guitar riffs, lonely crooning vocals, horn samples, and guest rapping (from Del tha Funky Homosapien and others) layered over whirlwind production. The creators put an enormous effort into creating animated characters for the Web site (see www.gorillaz.com) and videos for this project; the music tops all of that.

"The Blueprint," Jay-Z (Roc-A-Fella)—It's hard to stay on top in hip-hop for a year, let alone half a decade. But Jay-Z's sixth album in six years finds the pride of Brooklyn's Marcy projects overcoming legal headaches to serve up another top-notch specimen of gangsta rap. Jay-Z doesn't have the most innovative soundscapes (on the album's big hit, "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)," he includes a common Jackson 5 sample), but he doesn't need them: his control of the microphone is absolute, as he recently proved during the filming of an "Unplugged" special for MTV.

"Innocence and Despair," Langley Schools Music Project (Bar None)—Originally recorded on a two-track in a school gymnasium in rural British Columbia twenty-five years ago, this record contains nineteen classic-rock songs arranged by Hans Fenger, a hippie music teacher, and performed by a chorus of sixty elementary-school children. Rescued from permanent obscurity by Irwin Chusid, the WFMU d.j. and a champion of outsider music, it includes a gut-wrenching solo by Sheila Behman on the Eagles' "Desperado," as well as an otherworldly rendition of David Bowie's "Space Oddity."

"It's a Wonderful Life," Sparklehorse (Capitol)—A backwoods Southern gothic populated with roosters, donkeys, and poisonous frogs; a futuristic flea market of bygone electronica; the mild-mannered daydream of a gentleman farmer; or an A-list gala with special guests Tom Waits and P. J. Harvey? The luminous third album from Sparklehorse, the pet project of the rural-Virginia recluse and studio whiz Mark Linkous, is all of this, but it wears its art-rock ambitions—and fine songcraft—like a comfy old flannel shirt.

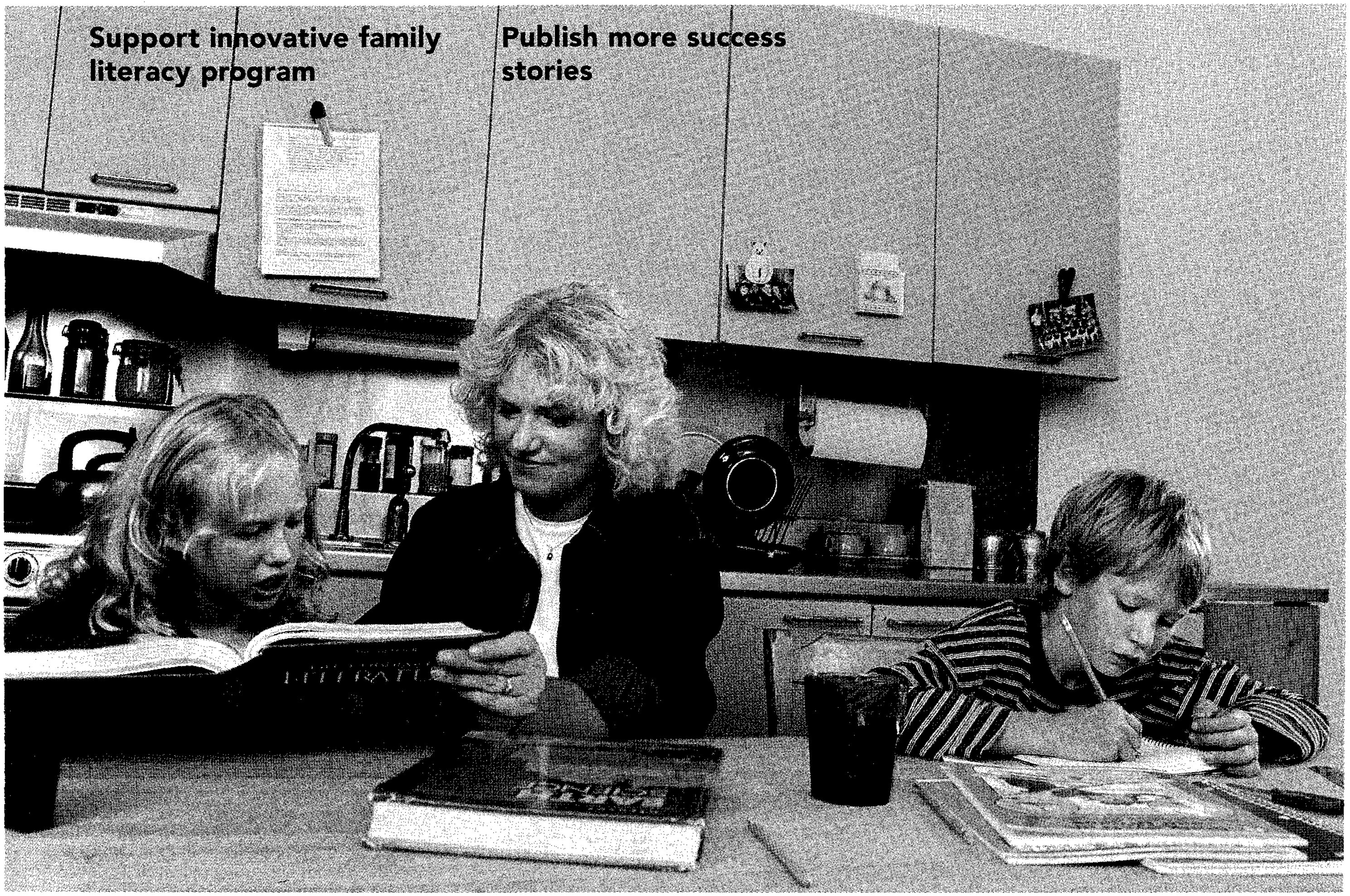
"The Tijuana Sessions Vol. 1," Nortec Collective (Palm)—Pile-driving tuba blasts, jackhammer snare-drum rolls, and other unexpected samples separate this wholly new construction from more commonplace electronic musings. This is not music for shopping; it's the soundtrack of globalization, created by a group of Mexican musicians, graphic artists, and architects who had the intelligence to let the accordions, horns, rhythms, and other bits of body-moving *norteño* licks act as more than window dressing.

"The Rainbow Children," Prince (NPG)—The royal one has always been acknowledged as a genius, but a frustrating genius: since the late eighties, his music, while displaying flashes of brilliance, has also been very uneven. Much of his inconsistency seemed the result of distraction—Prince spent years battling what he perceived as unfair practices by major labels, even going so far as to change his name to a squiggly symbol. "The Rainbow Children," originally released through his npgmusicclub.com Web site, isn't a return to his pop reign but is rather an evolution into a complex, adult style that mixes soul, jazz, and hard funk, and it's one of his best albums in years.

"Is This It?," the Strokes (RCA)—Despite the storm of hyperbole that both cast them as the saviors of rock and lambasted them as affluent upstarts, the New York City youths in the Strokes delivered a début album of hook-laden guitar grit. Cribbing wholesale from the Stooges, Television, and the Velvet Underground as well as less likely luminaries ("Last Nite" usurps the chiming guitars from Tom Petty's "American Girl"), the unabashedly retro Strokes reëstablish the city as the epicenter of cool.

"Time (the Revelator)," Gillian Welch (Acony)—The singer, working with her partner David Rawlings, updates the self-conscious Appalachian folk of her first two records ("Hell Among the Yearlings" and "Revival") with a warmer palette, which she uses to paint landscapes of American culture and history. Elvis Presley, the Titanic, and several bluesmen all make cameo appearances in either the melodies or the lyrics.

TODAY TOMORROW TOYOTA


Support innovative family literacy program
Publish more success stories

Sometimes it takes a great idea to give power to good intentions. We think the National Center for Family Literacy is a great idea, and that's why Toyota is proud to be one of its major supporters.

NCFL is the leader in parent-child learning. It's a powerful way to develop learning skills in young children by helping disadvantaged parents complete their own education and learn important life skills at the same time.

Toyota has provided support to more than 150 family literacy programs across America. By supporting NCFL, we hope that the book on missed opportunities will one day be closed forever.

To learn more about the great work of NCFL, visit www.famlit.org.

www.toyota.com/tomorrow

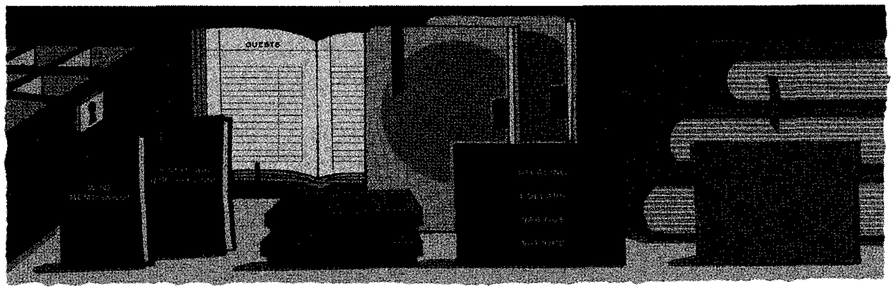
©2001

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Paper Chase

"It's got a handle, but it's meant, really, just to sit on your lovely desk," the clerk at the haute stationery store **SMYTHSON OF BOND STREET** (4 W. 57th St.; 265-4573) says, standing before a pale-azure secrétaire of such beauty that you'd expect to find it at the Winter Antiques Show. The case, which locks up like a valise in the unlikely event that you'd want to take it on a trip, opens to reveal a blotter, a place for an inkwell, and a series of drawers marked Paid, Unpaid, Answered, and Unanswered, "but we can stamp them, in gold or silver, with anything you want." Though the secrétaire ($3,660) is usually ordered in workaday black pigskin, the blue leather is hard to resist. "It's close to our own special color, Bond Street blue," the salesman says, and, in fact, the shade is a ringer for the hue that graces most of the firm's famous paper goods. Smythson may have arrived in midtown only five months ago, but it's got three royal warrants and has been kicking around London since the late eighteen-eighties. Much of the merchandise seems to have been in production for decades: there are books and journals with titles like Wardrobe Notes and Wine Memoranda, and at least one specimen that evokes Cary Grant more than it does Samuel Pepys: a little black book entitled Blondes Brunettes Redheads.



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

The sort of person who thinks the words "Palm Pilot" have something to do with trees or planes would feel right at home at **KATE'S PAPERIE** (561 Broadway; 941-9816), a bustling downtown institution that has an old-fashioned ribbon department and, on a recent afternoon, showed every sign of being recession-proof. A crimson leather book with the word "Diary" in Gothic script on its face has pages set aside to record marriages and births, like those Bibles that once held a place of honor in the parlor. Its 365 pages are dateless, a boon for would-be Anaïs Nins who start a journal every January and never get further than the first few days ($44).

It's just possible that the young shopper who has convinced you to visit the **SANRIO** store (233 W. 42nd St.; 840-6011) and is insisting that she needs Hello Kitty towels, a Hello Kitty snow globe, Hello Kitty panties, and maybe even a Hello Kitty television could be mollified with a Hello Kitty organizer ($20). The satin-covered book, just a few shades away from Bond Street blue, shows the famous Japanese cartoon cat's head ensconced in a heart surrounded by angel's wings; the interior offers a loop for a feline-topped pen, of which the shop sells what seems like several hundred versions. The case has a handle, too, so it can be carried, if not on a transatlantic journey, at least to the local elementary school.

The pattern of the signature date book at **KATE SPADE TRAVEL** (59 Thompson St.; 965-8654) allegedly incorporates the designer's initials, but to the untrained eye the black circles and truncated squares seem to have been lifted from a Victor Vaserly painting. A cheerful pink-and-green band trims the case, and inside, things get even giddier: many pages offer sketches of, according to the salesperson, "just things Kate likes." These enthusiasms include not just seasonal renderings of pumpkins and snowflakes but also fainting couches and high-heeled pumps, and there are even short messages like this one for January 3: "The Dutch believe that eating donuts on New Year's Day will bring good fortune."

—Lynn Yaeger

rival, over at M-G-M—was definitely the goofiest. In "Broadway Melody of 1938," for example, she sings in the rain only to end up doing the dog paddle in a deep puddle. In this edition of "Reel to Real" (a Lincoln Center series of film-and-stage shows for kids and their families), clips of Powell hula-tapping, conga-tapping, and tapping out Morse code alternate with live re-creations of her film numbers by the smooth hoofer Buster Brown, now eighty-eight years old; Jenny Lane, of "Pennies from Heaven"; and other, less seasoned performers. For the show's grand finale, toddling tappers and their creaky parents are invited onstage to jam. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 875-5370. Jan. 5 at 11:30 A.M. and 2.)

NIGHT LIFE

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Jan. 3-4: From Detroit's Brewster housing project to the bright lights of Times Square, **Mary Wilson** carries on the legacy of the Supremes.

BOTTOM LINE

15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Jan. 5: **Loudon Wainwright III's** new record, "Last Man on Earth," is a sombre collection of songs written about his mother, who died in 1997. The album's overt theme of death has been rendered more poignant by the events of the past few months. "This thing we call existence," he sings, "Who knows what it all means? / Time and Life and People / Are just glossy magazines." Wainwright shares the evening with **Suzzy** and **Maggie Roche** of the legendary folk trio the Roches. Their forthcoming release, "Zero Church," is a collection of prayers set to music which, like Wainwright's record, was recorded before September 11th. Now chord progressions and harmonies that would otherwise have seemed benign are tinged with a haunting darkness.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Jan 4: The **Zen Tricksters,** the erstwhile Grateful Dead cover band, is now bent on its own strange trip of improvisational jams.

BROWNIES

169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Jan. 4: **Babe the Blue Ox,** a coed Brooklyn-based trio that sounds like a quirky cross between Primus and King Crimson. In the mid-nineties, it enjoyed enough of a following to earn a record deal with RCA, which released two albums before dropping them two years ago. Slightly humbled, the Ox sounds even more ferocious. With the **Mink Lungs,** an eclectic Brooklyn band known for its riotous live performances. Jan. 5: **Baby Steps,** a band led by the Loser's Lounge keyboardist and cultural archeologist Joe McGinty, shares the bill with Mark Rozzo's unusually flexible and inventive ensemble **Champale** and the three-ring circus that is **Muckafurgason.**

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Jan. 5: The Maryland funk-metal alchemists **Clutch** and Brooklyn's rap-metal progenitors **Biohazard** offer a fine night out for fans who like to scowl and clench their (more than likely tattooed) fists.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Jan. 5: Over the past year the music press in the United Kingdom went wild over the New York City band the Strokes. Up north in Canada, the young lads in the **Constantines** bask in a similar, if more localized, limelight. The quartet from, Guelph, Ontario, has been compared quite favorably to such punk and protest icons as Fugazi and the Clash. To judge from songs on their self-titled début recording, they have the energy and the passion; here's hoping they live up to their reputation as an even better live band. Also on the bill is the **National.** This band of two sets of brothers and a friend, who left their native Ohio and moved to Brooklyn, carries on in the vein of the great Midwestern indie rockers Guided by Voices, with a touch of East Coast angst. With the **Boxstep,**

an earnest octet out of Pittsburgh that's making a name for itself with long, slow songs full of dragged-out vocals, grinding guitars, and violins.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Jan. 3: **Basement Bhangra.** An evening of ecstatic, futuristic dance music which fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London. D.j. Rekkha spices the infectious *dohl* drumbeat with pinches of classical raga, old-school hip-hop, dub reggae, and the occasional car crash or Malcolm X outburst. The frenetic but friendly dance floor is awhirl with turbans and saris, and Indian film clips are projected as a backdrop. This long-running party, now in its sixth year, makes your average world-music event seem as bland as Esperanto. Dining.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through Jan. 12: The vocalist **Andrea Marcovicci** pays tribute to Gertrude Lawrence, Noel Coward's theatrical better half. Dining.

ARCI'S PLACE
540 Park Ave. S, between 30th and 31st Sts. (532-4370)—Monday nights: **Christine Ebersole** is a vocal chameleon who can shift effortlessly from stentorian theatrics to intimate balladry, not to mention pulling off a terrific Jeanette McDonald imitation and an on-the-money trumpet solo accomplished only with her clenched hands and her mouth. She brings plenty of the ingenuity and wit that have won her raves in "42nd Street" to this midtown nightspot.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—One of the more persuasive soul-jazz guitarists out there today, **Peter Bernstein** (here with his quartet Jan. 3-5) has lent his bluesy energy to a wide range of players, including the venerable alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson and the contemporary sensation Joshua Redman. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—The enchanting vocalist **Regina Belle** stops by Jan. 2-6.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Jan. 1-6: The **Eliane Elias** trio. The Brazilian-born pianist and singer Elias has a light-handed ease with tropical rhythms and phrasing, as well as with mainstream jazz. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

KNICKERBOCKER
33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Jan. 2-5: The pianist **Judy Carmichael** strides like Fats Waller's long-lost daughter, and, in the saxophonist **Mike Hashim,** she's got a partner hooked into her pre-swing groove.

LE MADELEINE
403 W. 43rd St. (246-2993)—Sunday and Monday nights: It seems that only beautiful sounds emanate from **Gene Bertoncini's** guitar. This graceful stylist who moves effortlessly between his classical and electric instruments may be best known as part of a matchless duo with the bassist Michael Moore, but Bertoncini has more than enough resources to enchant on his own. Dining.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—Jan. 4-5: The trumpeter **Danny Moore** may not have the name recognition of some of the other veterans of the hard-bop era, but, judging from the A-list group of friends that are turning out for his birthday, it pays to be a musician's musician. His special guests include the legendary saxophonist **Lou Donaldson,** the trumpet luminary **Clark Terry,** the singers **Cassandra Wilson** and **Freddy Cole,** the guitarist **Russell Malone,** the drummer **Jimmy Cobb,** and the saxophonist **Frank Wess.** Moore's own band, with the pianist **Harold Mabern** and the tenor saxophonist **Eric Alexander,** is up to the challenge.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 6: **Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band of New Orleans.** The clarinettist and musicologist White is a proud scion of New Orleans who lives to celebrate the riches of jazz's first golden era. His exuberant renditions of classics by Armstrong, Bechet, King Oliver, and other Big Easy icons are sure to bring Southern sunshine to our wintry shores.

Portraits by the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta, at Sean Kelly (see Photography).

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island"** sparks wonderment about the speck in the South Pacific whose remarkable civilization rose and fell during the thousand years before the first white man made landfall, on Easter Sunday in 1722. Only a few works in the show—including a smallish example (weighing twelve hundred pounds) of the great stone heads—predate that fateful event; the rest are mostly nineteenth-century wooden objects from a final efflorescence of native genius. The art has a familiar Polynesian look but is haunted by the memories of a dying race whose past included disastrous civil wars and the astonishing cult of the Birdman: each year, the island's leader was selected on the basis of a perilous quest for an egg of the sooty tern. Through Aug. 4. ♦ **"Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed"** traces ideals of beauty from head to toe (with notable detours at the neck, bust, and waist) and the gloriously absurd fashions that ensue in their pursuit. Curator Harold Koda contrasts recent examples of haute couture with artifacts from other cultures and historic periods, so a Commes des Garçons organza ruff about as large as an end table shares the stage with an elaborately beaded Masai collar. Through March 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An Alberto Giacometti retrospective reacquaints us with the Swiss sculptor's iconic skinny statues while emphasizing his paintings and his less esteemed Surrealist objects of the nineteen-thirties. The paintings, mostly portraits from the nineteen-fifties, expend obsessive energy to visually skimpy ends. But the great statues are more engaging than ever. These tragicomic presences don't so much stand in the world as stand up to it. Through Jan. 8. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Brazil: Body & Soul."** Through Jan. 27. ♦ **"Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People."** Through March 3. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The melancholy of small-town living may have a finer cham-

pion in Hopper, but if it's the latent menace of a clotted rural sky you want, Charles Burchfield's your man. This concise exhibition of works on paper, drawn from the museum's permanent collection, emphasizes watercolor, the medium for which Burchfield is best known, and the inclusion of several stilted engravings does little to alter that reputation. Rapture strikes when least expected, as a field of goldenrod becomes an exotic jungle of feathery stalks. Elsewhere, a shaft of white light transforms the trunk of a bare-branched tree in a cramped back yard into a celestial apparition. Through Jan. 20. ♦ **"Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence."** Through Feb. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum,"** a modest blockbuster culled from the collections of the British Museum, opens with a group of rare wooden statuettes from the Old Kingdom. One of them still has a painted guideline running down the center of her torso. Equally fascinating is a drawing board, more than three thousand years old, with a mix of finished and practice motifs: a serene Pharaoh, a quail chick, and seven crude efforts at hands. But the show also offers plenty of moments of Ozymandian grandeur, among them a reclining lion in red granite (looking a good deal more formidable than his Fifth Avenue cousins) and a vast and trunkless head of Amenhotep III. Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

JULES OLITSKI

A small show of pastel-and-crayon drawings from 1963 and 1964 by the arch color-field painter packs a surprising punch. In those days—before producing the tasty weather fronts of sprayed paint for which he is best known—Olitski played big and little expanses of flat color against each other with balletic snap. Here, humbly scrawled quarter-circles, blobs, and dots combine with sketched internal frames to discreetly monumental, somehow racy effect. Anyone inclined to reconsider Olitski's once overblown and subsequently charred reputation might start with these offhand gems. Through Jan. 5. (Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110.)

"THE PASSIONS"

This classy miscellany, offering works from Cranach and Dürer to Diane Arbus and Robert Gober, is perhaps the most enchanting, and certainly the most eclectic, show of the winter. An expendable conceit—that the pictures catalogue emotional states—links Renaissance Lamentations to photographs and videos, and permits some mischievous juxtapositions: Richard Avedon's 1957 portrait of a haggard, defeated Duke and Duchess of Windsor hangs beside Jeff Koons's ecstatic bust of himself in the arms of his porn-queen ex-wife Ilona. As a representation of happiness, though, the Koonses' bliss can't compete with the hilarity of a Garry Winogrand photograph from 1968, which captures a woman in mid-guffaw, holding the ice-cream cone that pushed her over the top. Through Jan. 12. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

"SEX IN THE CITY"

The city in question is Edo, or Tokyo, back during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when men outnumbered women two to one; one result of this imbalance was an explosion of *shunga*, or "erotic prints." In fact, the imagery is exultantly hard-core, with a carnal specificity that puts Bob Guccione to shame. And yet, for *shunga* artists and their audience, libidinous needs were generally satisfied with a refined, amazing stylization. The results, especially Koryusai's "Twelve Bouts of Sensuality," are beautiful art works that one feels a little embarrassed making an appointment to visit. Through Jan. 15. (Scholten, 63 E. 66th St. 585-0474.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

The parents of the nonagenarian artist repaired tapestries in her native France. Bourgeois returns to those roots in this moving show dominated by stitched-fabric sculptures. Stacks of handmade pillows made of mattress ticking or silk and velvet in lavender and baby blue echo the wooden totems for which she first came to prominence in the fifties. More powerful are groups of small stuffed and stitched human figures that evoke intimate pleasures (four anatomically correct couples strung from the ceiling and locked in embrace) and secret shame (a sock puppet sculpture, "Bulimia," with a swollen belly). Through Jan. 5. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St., 242-7727.)

XAVIER VEILHAN

Two grids of light bulbs (more than a thousand in each) programmed to play low-grade black-and-white film montages of a staring eye, a person dancing, a passing landscape, and flames. To see the images clearly, back up across Twenty-second Street. (A block away might be optimal.) Up close, the fluttering, shimmering light effects are pleasant, but the scalding heat emitted by all those incandescent bulbs is not. As usual with Veilhan, a veteran French conceptualist, one senses an elegant talent expending itself to nifty but inconsiderable ends. Through Jan. 12. (Gering, 534 W. 22nd St. 646-336-7138.)

Short List

JOHN AHEARN

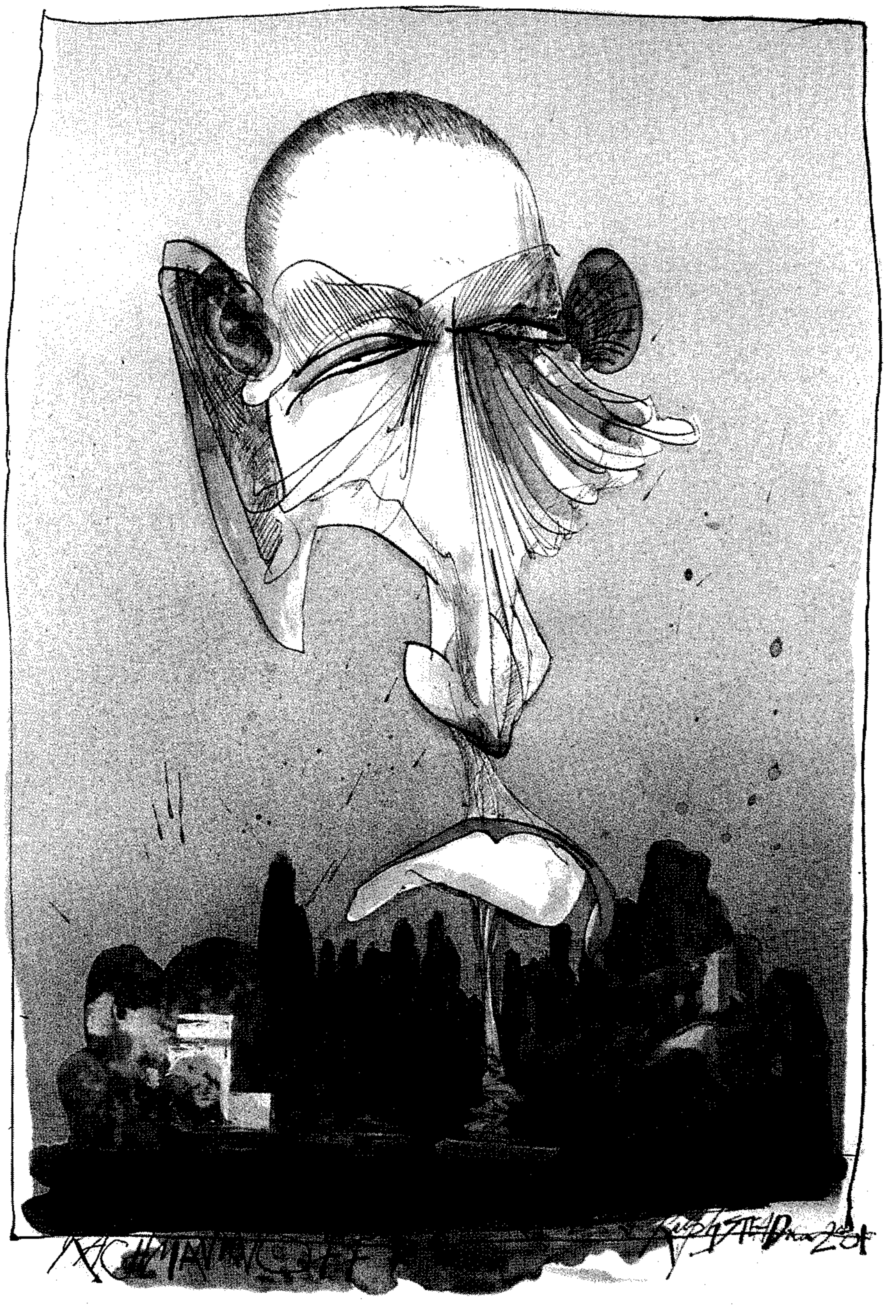
Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474. Through Jan. 12.

LARS NØRGÅRD

DCA, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.
Through Jan. 19.

ANTON VIDOKLE

Audiello, 526 W. 26th St. 675-9082.
Through Jan. 19.



RACHMANINOFF REVISITED *The arch-Romantic composer (whom Stravinsky once described as a "six-foot scowl") is honored with a five-concert retrospective at Lincoln Center, beginning on January 5.*

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

TONY MATELLI
The gallery inaugurates its new space with a pair of rambunctious sculptures by Tony Matelli which riff on classical themes: the hunter and the man in reverie. These self-portraits caricature the artist before and after sexual conquest in tableaux that resemble both museum dioramas and Happy Meal action figures magnified to human scale. Matelli portrays himself with a disproportionately large head à la Alfred E. Neuman. But aside from this distortion, the sculptures are disarmingly lifelike. Through Jan. 13. (Koenig, 249 Centre St. 334-9255.)

Short List

CHRISTOPHE BÜCHEL
Maccarone, 45 Canal St. 431-4977. Through Jan. 5.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

MIRIAM DYM / REED ANDERSON AND JEF SCHARF
The Californian Dym is best known for room-size installations; here she offers virtual spaces instead, in the form of giant colorful architectural drawings. "Ramp Buckets Room" is a sort of fantasy studio, all consoles and walkways, with an easel-like contraption in the center. Though computer graphics and underground comics are clearly part of Dym's mix of sources, she seems ebulliently sui generis; at times, her crosshatched whimsical rigor suggests a sci-fi version of Edward Gorey. In the front gallery, Anderson and Scharf offer an amiable profusion of cartoony pictographs that will remind some viewers of another Ninth Street, back in the East Village. Through Jan. 7. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St, Williamsburg. 718-599-1666.)

DAVID OPDYKE
Opdyke continues to turn current events into fodder for his semi-frivolous ingenuity. Electoral maps, corporate icons, and candidates' names are matched with motors, models, and L.E.D.s. The results are often sardonically diverting, as in a spinning word shuffler that produces Surrealist imperatives like "Arrest Slobodan bin Laden" and "Impeach Madeleine Lewinsky." At best, though, as in "Aviation Agglomeration," a suspended molecule of tiny briefcases, the objects themselves have an open-ended resonance that counters the artist's predilection for shtick. Through Jan. 12. (Roebling Hall, 390 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. 718-599-5352.)

"PEPPERMINT"
This collection of sex-related work begins by flashing its underwear—slips on hangers and portraits in tighty whities—then continues to tease. Kelly Hashimoto's PowerPoint presentation ". . . And Her Boys" offers tidy charts of untidy alliances, while Nicolás Dumi-Estévez's tropical-fruit cooking video stars himself, in red lipstick and fingernails. Jana Leo de Blas's canopied bed made out of bubble wrap behaves even more provocatively by addressing viewers directly, instructing them to "take off your shoes, go in, take off your clothes, open your skin, do it." The sheets are mussed but the condom provided by the artist is still sealed and hanging from the bedpost. Through Jan. 13. (Smack Mellon Studios, 56 Water St., Dumbo. 718-834-8761.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

EUGÈNE ATGET
Viewers fond of Atget's thoughtful photographs of bourgeois architecture may be surprised by "Documenting the Zone," which records his wanderings in Paris's *zone militaire*, with its patched fences, wooden trailers, scraggly cats, and ragpickers. Among the improvised shelters he documents, one remarkably austere structure stands out: a long, low building backed up against a canal, covered almost entirely in thin, venetian-blind-like slats, an unsettlingly indefinable building that could be a laundry or a tannery or a Mies van der Rohe twenty years before its time. Through Jan. 19. (Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.)

RALPH STEADMAN

SEYDOU KEÏTA
From 1948 to 1962, Keïta ran a studio in Bamako, Mali, with an eight-by-ten-inch camera and some props: a radio, a Vespa, a patterned bedspread. Sitters came from all over the countryside wearing combinations of traditional flowing robes and Western dresses and suits, which makes for an arresting document of both African tribal culture and fifties mod style. Only within the past few years has Keïta, who died last November, begun to receive his due in America. These forty portraits provide a gorgeous introduction to the rarely seen work of the "image king of Africa." Through Feb. 2. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 239-1181.)

LINDA MC CARTNEY (1941-2000)
"The Light from Within: Photojournals" follows the photographer and wife of Paul in her journey from rock reporter to rock reportee: "Press, Chile" (1993) looks out at a wall of cameras and one grinning woman who has set hers down to say cheese. Though the exhibition offers lyrical work, like "Flowers in the Dirt, London" (1989), the best pictures here take advantage of the artist's singular marriage: "Paul, Stella, and James, Scotland" (1982) shows the former Wings front man standing on a tree-trunk fence in his bathrobe, watching the young James launch himself in midair toward his sister. Through Jan. 5. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

BARBARA MORGAN
The photographer of early modern dance used the medium not just to document but to interpret movement. In portraits of Martha Graham, José Limón, Merce Cunningham, and others, Morgan's compositional choreography seems designed to match the movement of the dance. In "War Theme," from 1941, Martha Graham leans into the frame from the left side, her neck thrown back so her hair flows across the picture, as her long black skirt billows behind her and across the frame—the great choreographer seems to snap forward in a breeze of her own invention. Through Jan. 12. (Silverstein, 504 W. 22nd St. 627-3930.)

MASAO YAMAMOTO
The Japanese artist has named his show of stained and worn snapshots "Nakazora," after the Buddhist term for "the space between sky and earth, the place where birds, etc., fly." The images, more than two hundred taped to the gallery wall to form a constellation, are focussed and specific. But their archetypal subjects are ambiguous enough (a caged polar bear, a poised calico cat, a wide shadow across a narrow path) to generate an emotional response. Through Jan. 19. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

"AT HOME IN FRANCE"
Three North American photographers in France, who work almost exclusively in black-and-white, with the exception of a few color trails in Richard Ballarian's prints. Robert Mann and Ian Patterson offer pinhole landscapes with a whiff of tourism: Mann explores Touraine, while Patterson walks the Seine. His dollhouse-size calotypes of Paris's bridges, made in cameras rigged from film canisters, copper foil, and electrical tape, are the show's child stars: they're charming scene-stealers, but if they got any bigger, they wouldn't be cute. Through Jan. 10. (Alliance Française, 22 E. 60th St. 355-6100.)

"8 X 10"
Ansel Adams taught Harry Callahan, who taught Emmett Gowin; all three shot in nature using eight-by-ten view cameras. None of Adams's work appears here, but the influence of his ruthless no-stone-unfocussed style is palpable. Callahan modified the Master's manner by abstracting it, keeping his allover focus but making depth and scale uncertain to create a sense of instability. Gowin, while informed by both men, seems to be toying with our expectations: in his work, a pile of garbage can become a Martian landscape. Through Jan. 12. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—The galleries are closed for installation until Jan. 11. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

PAVEL BANKA
Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 327-2211. Through Feb. 2.

E. J. BELLOCQ
Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410. Through Feb. 2.

WYNN BULLOCK (1902-1975)
Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Jan. 5.

IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM (1883-1976)
Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0070. Through Jan. 5.

JOEL STERNFELD
Pace/MacGill, 534 W. 25th St. 759-7999.

TABLES FOR TWO

WALLSÉ
344 W. 11th St. (352-2300)—At this snug, sometimes boisterous spot, which attracts both homesick Austrians and the city's more sombre food lovers, the proprietor and chef Kurt Gutenbrunner shows what his native country's specialties can achieve when they are prepared with understated grace. The tiny twin storefronts, with whitewashed brick walls and blurry architectural photos, are more Josef Hoffmann than Gustav Klimt; but they are somehow grand in their simplicity, just like the food.

Chestnut soup, billed on the menu as a "Viennese Mélange," is a creamy holiday treat spiked with cognac. But the oxtail consommé is kind of depressing, all tradition and purity. The savory spaetzle, flavored with Quark—a fresh curd cheese that comes across like sour cream—are fortified by braised rabbit and wild mushrooms. And the potato roesti is perfectly balanced between crispness and fluff—supporting a punchy coalition of salmon tartare, salmon caviar, and watercress.

Wiener schnitzel is the chicken-fried steak of Central Europe, and Wallsé's lack of pretension suits the humble breaded veal cutlet, which is juicy and light. The second most important Viennese dish for traditionalists is Tafelspitz, but no matter how nicely beef is boiled, the eating becomes a chore about halfway through, even though the side of creamed spinach helps matters. The menu's Hungarian ringer, beef goulash, is surprisingly light and balanced, with none of the usual over-paprikaed-leftover taste. Pastries are sacred in Vienna, and there's a great entrée option here: cod strudel with melted tomatoes, tarragon, and Riesling sauce.

More traditional pastries turn up at dessert: apple strudel, Salzburger Nockerl, and crêpelike Palatschinken, with oranges. The standout is the poached dumplings filled with more Quark and coated in sautéed bread crumbs and ground nuts. The wine list offers the opportunity for an easygoing, inexpensive education in Austrian wines, from Gruener Veltliners to Blaufraenkisches, among them a terrific spicy red that is fun to say aloud—Heinrich's Pannobile Rot. (Open daily for dinner only. Entrées $20-$28.)

—*Owen Phillips*

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Hänsel und Gretel," the ideal children's opera, returns once again for the holiday season, featuring a cast more than strong enough to satisfy discriminating grownup tastes. Dawn Upshaw and Jennifer Larmore take the title roles, joined by Judith Forst, Stephanie Blythe, and Kim Josephson; Charles Mackerras conducts. (Jan. 2 at 7.) ♦ Mackerras conducts

BOOK CURRENTS

Last Words

Obituarists have been cropping up in imaginative literature with insistent frequency of late. Patrick Marber's 1997 play, "Closer," featured a disenchanted hack who explained how he ended up in this " 'Siberia' of journalism": "They ask you to write your own obituary. If it amuses, you're in." The narrator of Porter Shreve's black comedy, **THE OBITUARY WRITER** (Mariner), published in 2000, explained, "My job was taking the measure of people's lives." In the more sinister world of Andrey Kurkov's novel **DEATH AND THE PENGUIN** (Harvill), newly translated from the Russian by George Bird, Viktor, a struggling writer, gets a job preparing grandiloquent obituaries and starts off determined "that even the simple collective farmer, having never known the late whoever-it-was he was reading about, would brush away a tear." Though well paid, Viktor becomes increasingly concerned that his subjects, post-Soviet mobsters, are dying suspiciously.

Real obituaries, however, are not about death at all, but about life. Where else in the recent war-torn weeks could one have read about a woman who claimed that dead composers dictated music to her or about a sideshow performer famous for hammering nails up his nose? **52 MCGS.** (Scribner) is a collection of sparkling obituaries by the late New York *Times* writer Robert McG. Thomas, Jr. His work earned him a Pulitzer nomination, and his own *Times* obituary credited him with "shaking the dust from one of the most neglected areas of daily journalism." His tastes ran to the offbeat: the inventor of Kitty Litter, the detective famous as "the man who put a bug in a martini olive." So lively were his accounts that, as Thomas Mallon's foreword says, "he is survived by everyone he ever wrote about."

—Leo Carey

a final performance, with Emily Pulley, Jane Bunnell, Judith Christin, Claudia Waite, and John Fanning. (Jan. 5 at 8.) ♦ For historical scope and dramatic sweep, none of Verdi's later operas surpass **"Don Carlo,"** a family tragedy set against the backdrop of the Spanish Inquisition. With Galina Gorchakova, Irina Mishura, Richard Margison, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Samuel Ramey, and Paata Burchuladze; Valery Gergiev. (Jan. 3 at 7.) ♦ With Dolora Zajick replacing Mishura. (Jan. 7 at 7.) ♦ Catherine Malfitano takes the title role in the first performance this season of **"Tosca,"** with Franco Farina and James Morris; Daniel Oren. (Jan. 4 at 8.) ♦ The long-awaited new production of **"Die Frau Ohne Schatten,"** Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannstahl's wacky, grandiose fairy-tale opera about the complexities of stolen fertility. Herbert Wernicke, the director and designer, makes maximum use of the house's hydraulic capacities and of a strong cast led by the sumptuous Deborah Voigt in the title role, a relentlessly shrewish Gabriele Schnaut as the Dyer's Wife, Hanna Schwarz as the conniving Nurse, and Thomas Moser and Wolfgang Brendel as the heroically hapless men in their lives. Christian Thielemann conducts, coaxing luminous sound from the Met orchestra. (Jan. 5 at 12:30 and Jan. 8 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA
The venerable chamber company concludes its performances of **"The Magic Flute,"** conducted and directed by Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Jan. 5 at 7:30 and Jan. 6 at 2:30.)

NEW YORK GILBERT AND SULLIVAN PLAYERS
After twenty-two years of tending the flame at Symphony Space, New York's leading advocates for Gilbert and Sullivan move to City Center for a mini-festival of the major Savoy operas, beginning with **"H.M.S. Pinafore"**; much joy and rapture is promised. Albert Bergeret conducts. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 4 at 8, Jan. 5 at 3 and 8, and Jan. 6 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
David Zinman conducts music by Glinka (the overture to "Ruslan and Lyudmila"), Dvořák (the "New World" Symphony), and Glazunov (the Violin Concerto, with Midori). (Jan. 3-5 at 8.) ♦ A chamber ensemble from the orchestra (including the clarinettist Mark Nuccio and the violinist Sheryl Staples) presents Dohnányi's Sextet in C Major, Op. 37, followed by another performance of the "New World" Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Jan. 5 at 2.)

RACHMANINOFF REVISITED
Once denounced as a saccharine Tchaikovsky imitator, Rachmaninoff (whom Stravinsky, not a fan, once described as a "six-foot scowl") can now be seen for what he was: a central composer of the modern age whose lyrically captivating and forcefully original music is more influential than ever before. Lincoln Center's one-week mini-festival (originally scheduled for late September), with Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Philharmonia Orchestra of London, offers a global view of his output, with many of the popular works mixed in with less familiar fare; introductory lectures precede most of the concerts. Jan. 5 at 8: The St. Petersburg Chamber Choir, conducted by Nikolai Kornev, sings the composer's haunting "Vespers," Op. 37, one of the cornerstones of Russian sacred music. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 721-6500.) ♦ Jan. 6 at 5: "The Bells," an oratorio based on the poem by Edgar Allan Poe, is core Rachmaninoff: joyous, brilliant, and sombre by turns, and full of the sounds and rhythms of the Russian Orthodox Church. Marina Shaguch, Ilya Levinsky, and Sergei Koptchak are the vocal soloists, with Ashkenazy conducting the Philharmonia, the St. Petersburg Chamber Choir, and the Dessoff Choirs. Also on the program are the "Three Russian Songs," Op. 41, and the original manuscript version of the Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Alexander Ghindin, in his New York début). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500.) ♦ Jan. 7 at 7:30: The pianist Mikhail Pletnev performs Rachmaninoff's "Corelli Variations" along with music by Tchaikovsky (including the rarely performed "Grand Sonata" and excerpts from "The Sleeping Beauty," arranged by Pletnev). (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Jan. 8 at 8: Ashkenazy and the Philharmonia return for performances of the "Paganini Rhapsody" (with the pianist Stephen Hough) and two less familiar works, the pitch-black tone poem "The Isle of the Dead" (inspired by the Böcklin painting) and the enigmatic Symphony No. 3 in A Minor. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ (**Note:** On Jan. 6 at 1, the musicologist Gerald McBurney moderates a panel discussion about Rachmaninoff, which is free to festival ticket holders. Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Bldg., 165 W. 65th St., 10th Fl. The festival concludes with an orchestral concert on Jan. 9.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
Two programs traversing Beethoven's Op. 18 string quartets, his début in the genre, featuring the violinists Mark Peskanov and Patricia Kopatchinskaja, the violist Toby Hoffman, and the cellist Jan Vogler. Jan. 3-4 at 7:30: Quartets Nos. 1-3. ♦ Jan. 5 at 7:30 and Jan. 6 at 4: The conclusion of the Op. 18 series (Quartets Nos. 4-6). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

J. PATRICK RAFFERTY AND BRUCE MURRAY
The violinist and the pianist present an afternoon of Beethoven violin sonatas (Nos. 8-10). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 6 at 3.)

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL ORGAN SERIES
Anthony Burke inaugurates a new year of Sunday organ recitals at the cathedral, with a program of music by Gigout and Vierne. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St. Jan. 6 at 4:45. No tickets required.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
When Jens Nygaard, the eccentric, beloved, and demanding founder and conductor of the Jupiter Symphony, died, last September, it was reportedly his wish that the orchestra not continue after his death—a last testament more supportive of the Nygaard myth than of the hardworking young musicians who gave him devoted and energetic performances week after week. A chamber-music series, however, has been established in his memory; in classic Nygaard style, its first program mixes rather obscure composers (Boismortier and Fasch) with the undervalued (C. P. E. Bach) and the ubiquitous (Vivaldi). The performers are the flutist Barry Crawford, the oboist Robert Ingliss, the hornist Karl Kramer-Johansen, and the harpsichordist Gerald Ranck. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Jan. 8 at 2 and 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

AVAST YE JANUARY BLUES!
If the darkness of winter leaves you dreaming of the lower latitudes, where the sunshine is never in short supply, cruise over to the ninety-second annual New York National Boat Show, which starts on Jan. 5 at 10 A.M. More than a thousand luxury yachts, sport-fishing vessels, and other boats will be on display. And if the prospect of laying out a wad of cash (or credit) this year seems a tad more unrealistic than it was back before the stock market decided to make like an ebb tide, it's still worth going—they're giving away a few boats that are each roughly the value of a down payment on a house. (Javits Convention Center, Eleventh Ave. between 34th and 39th Sts. 624-7000. Through Jan. 13.)

"SCIENCE FOR POETS"
The Nobel-laureate chemist Roald Hoffman inaugurates a monthly gathering at the Cornelia Street Café by joining the musician/philosopher David Rothenberg and the mother-and-son team of the biologist Lynn Margulis and the writer Dorion Sagan (their latest book together is "Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution") for a discussion about thermodynamics and the purpose of life. The bar will be open. (29 Cornelia St. 989-9319. Jan. 6 at 6.)

DOUG ALLEN

MOVIES OPENING

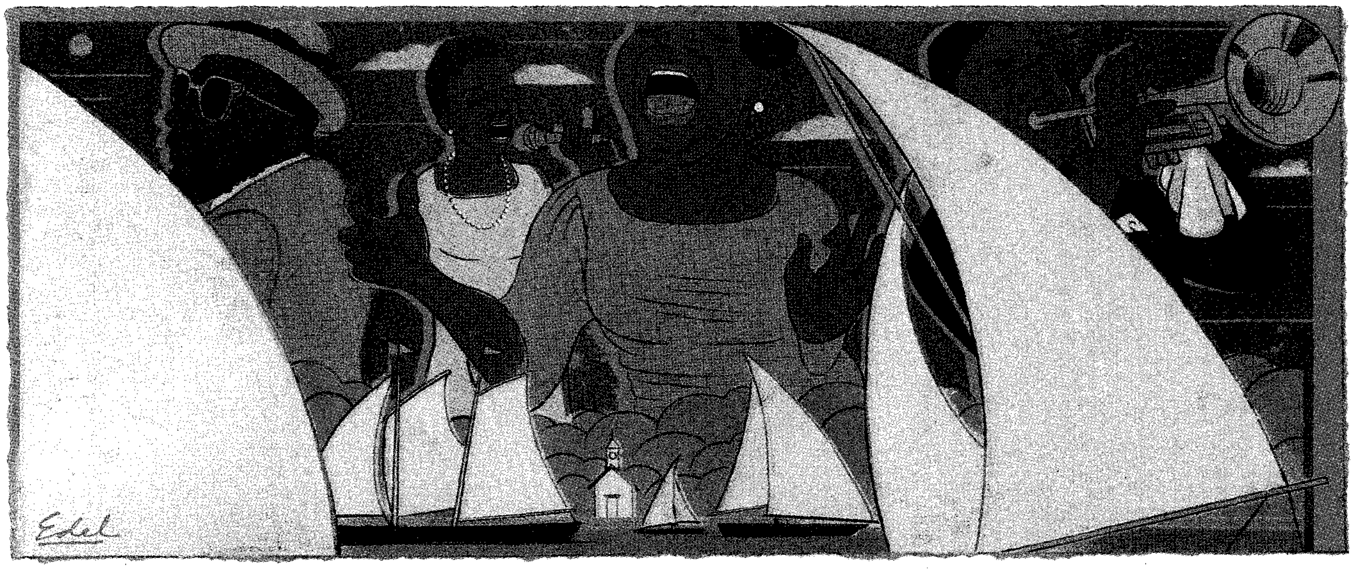
EISENSTEIN

Renny Bartlett's portrait of the early Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein (Simon McBurney), who completed "Battleship Potemkin" at the age of twenty-seven. Opening Jan. 2. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

ALI

Impersonating Muhammad Ali, Will Smith, muscled up, ears flattened, and with his features reshaped, gets the right Kentucky music in his voice. Smith has also developed the slow-moving meditativeness of a big-bodied man, but he misses the spontaneity of the brazen young Ali, and nothing can match the speed of Ali's punch—the re-creations of the champion's famous fights with Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman don't come close to the savagery of the real thing. This elaborate biopic, directed by Michael Mann, who wrote the script with Eric Roth, is beautifully made, but it lacks a fresh point of view or even successful dramatic shaping. Many of the actors, however, are superb, including Jamie Foxx, Jeffrey Wright, Giancarlo Esposito, and Mykelti Williamson, as a young Don King.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/24 & 31/01.) (Olympia I and II.)



PURE PLEASURE *Anita O'Day's triple-time "Tea for Two," Mahalia Jackson's almighty "Didn't It Rain?," Fred Katz's smoky Bach solo, and Newport in 1958 with its Life-magazine sheen—"Jazz on a Summer's Day" screens this week at Walter Reade.*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

AMÉLIE

A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it—not to mention its dangerous surfeit of sweetness—appears to have touched a universal nerve. (In truth, the saga of the movie's success is more telling than anything in the movie itself.) Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this new movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—*Anthony Lane* (11/5/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and Paris.)

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

BLACK HAWK DOWN

This account of the ill-fated Special Forces action in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993, which resulted in the death of eighteen Americans, is spectacular in all the good ways. It's exceptionally violent but also truthful to the pain and disorder of battle, and it's very clearly directed by Ridley Scott, so you can see where the different groups of men are fighting in relation to one another. The movie suggests that despite the casualties the episode was not a total failure but rather a demonstration of strength—the men were killed, in part, because they stayed in the city to rescue the survivors from two helicopters that were shot down. With Sam Shepard, Tom Sizemore, and Josh Hartnett, all submerging themselves in the business at hand, which is grim but stirring. Ken Nolan, adapting Mark Bowden's book, achieves the right tone of matter-of-factness, resolution, and defiance.—*D.D.* (12/24 & 31/01) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

THE BUSINESS OF STRANGERS

A joyless, time-starved executive (Stockard Channing) spends an evening in the company of the underling (Julia Stiles) she just fired. They make up over too many drinks and then, for good measure, hatch a plan to humiliate a wolfish headhunter (Frederick Weller), thus righting the wrongs inflicted by corporate man. You can sense the setup of Patrick Stettner's first feature creaking beneath the weight of contrivance, and all the shots of the characters coldly caged in glass and steel are an elegant way of making a fairly obvious point. But the two lead actresses breathe, or maybe slap, life into the whole conceit, and Channing offers a fine case study in frustration—a career's worth of rage, let loose for a single night.—*A.L.* (12/17/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CODE UNKNOWN

A mosaic of stories, most of them disheartening. There is the occasional moment in Michael Haneke's film when the characters stumble upon pleasure, but it soon passes; as the title suggests, they have enough trouble establishing lines of communication among themselves. Anne (Juliette Binoche) is an actress whose relations with her lover (Thierry Nouvic) flicker from silence to tiff; Jean (Alexandre Hamidi) is a boy in baffled conflict with his father; Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke) is a young black teacher, arrested for trying to stand up for a beggar; and the beggar herself, Maria (Luminita Gheorghiu), is a Romanian immigrant crumpled with shame. Haneke cuts back and forth from one to the next with such skill, and with so little superfluous detail, that the effect is oddly bracing; his is not the portentous alienation of Antonioni, but the hard, topical distillation of ethnic strife—not of a Europe deep in thought, but of a Europe under fire. In French, with many of the characters speaking their native languages.—*A.L.* (12/3/01) (Quad Cinema.)

IN THE BEDROOM

In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei), who has two little boys. Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an intriguing, elliptical short story by Andre Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings, moods, and manners in Camden and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence, both verbal and physical, actually means something.—*D.D.* (11/26/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

KANDAHAR

The latest film by the Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf couldn't be better timed. The story is just a series of gestures: Nafas (Nelofer Pazira), an Afghan woman who left her country as a teenager, returns to look for her suicidal sister. On the way to Kandahar (conceived as a state of mind as much as a place), Nafas runs into a variety of helpers disguising themselves to avoid persecution by the Taliban—men in burkas, a boy faking an inability to read the Koran, a benevolent African-American wearing a false beard. The sequences don't have much continuity, but Makhmalbaf turns the desolation of the country into scenes of iconic power. The repeated motif: flimsy new plastic and wooden legs made for the many who have lost their limbs to land mines. In Farsi and English.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

KATE & LEOPOLD

A time-travel romantic comedy starring Meg Ryan as a modern-day executive and Hugh Jackman as the nineteenth-century duke who leaps into her life. James Mangold, the director, imparts a casual, easy-listening feel to the proceedings (none of the actors hit their lines too hard), but the movie's plotless machinations are numbingly routine, and both Jackman and Ryan seem a bit mature to be so silly in love. The film does have some great supporting performances by Breckin Meyer as Ryan's brother and Natasha Lyonne as her assistant; they should have been cast as the leads.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

KISS ME DEADLY

In this 1955 flick, Robert Aldrich and his screenwriter take Mickey Spillane's 1952 private-eye novel and turn it into a swipe at consumer-era machismo. Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) picks up a desperate female hitchhiker (Cloris Leachman, in her first movie role), who pegs him as a guy concerned only with his clothes, his sports car, and his physique. After some mysterious torturers murder Leachman and nearly kill Hammer, he decides to investigate the homicide himself—not because he got attached to Leachman but because he figures that any case getting federal attention is bound to involve big money. Brando stripped of poetry and sensitivity and glazed with playboy glamour—that's what Meeker looks, sounds, and acts like as Hammer. He's a clumsy, rabid spellbinder, and so is the movie.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 2.)

LANTANA

The metaphorical title refers to a plant bearing exotic flowers (and hidden thorns beneath). The movie, directed by Ray Lawrence, concerns four sets of married couples whose lives are in various states of disarray and a missing person's investigation that will connect them all. Anthony LaPaglia is especially memorable as the guilt-ridden chief detective, but all the veteran actors (including Geoffrey Rush and Barbara Hershey) have engaging roles. There's an Altman-like brio to the ensemble cast which keeps the movie spinning intriguingly to its conclusion.—*B.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

It takes about forty-five minutes for the movie to emerge from Sir Ian McKellen's beard (he plays the garrulous wizard Gandalf), but once it does, this enormous hunk of quasi-medieval myth, based on the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, is consistently beautiful and exciting. The New Zealander director Peter Jackson, who wrote the screenplay with Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, works with enough dramatic tension and pictorial grandeur to sustain us through long periods of complicated exposition and heavy bouts of swordplay. Elijah Wood, of the troubled blue eyes, plays the hobbit Frodo, who has been entrusted with the task of destroying a ring that grants supreme power. He is accompanied in this quest by Gandalf, two noble human warriors (Viggo Mortensen and Sean Bean), an intemperate, black-bearded dwarf (John Rhys-Davies), and various scampering hobbits. They are beset by wraiths on horseback and by orcs, misshapen beasts at the command of the vile Sauron. The New Zealand landscapes—jagged mountains, thickety glens, limitless plains—add to the aura of enchantment.—*D.D.* (12/24 & 31/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

In a clever remake of his 1934 suspense film about a child kidnapped by terrorists, Alfred Hitchcock proves that a functional family with problems is more dramatically compelling than the dysfunctional families of contemporary thrillers. In this 1956 version, the parents are a mildly mismatched Indianapolis doctor (James Stewart) and a retired musical star (Doris Day). The action, which takes them from Morocco to London, brings out his edge of paternalism and her floating frustrations, only to unite them as equals in two classic set pieces—an assassination attempt during a concert in the Royal Albert Hall and a covert search for the snatched kid in an unnamed foreign embassy. Day, who gets to use her voice as a weapon and a homing device, is excellent, as are Stewart, Brenda de Banzie, and Bernard Miles.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Jan. 3-5.)

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

A woman wanders away from a car wreck and into a strange house. Little old people scurry under the foot of a door, squeaking like mice. Yes, it's a David Lynch project. This one began life as a TV pilot; you can just imagine the aghast faces of the network executives as they saw what they had commissioned. In the event, the elongated weirdness, stretching to two and a half hours, feels discomfortingly at home on the larger screen; if you ever wanted to see an epic horror-soap, this is what it would look like. Many established Lynch motifs are in place, most of them summoned from one corner or another of the nineteen-fifties: the innocent blonde (Naomi Watts), the baffled brunette (Laura Elena Harring), the clueless cop (Robert Forster). Addicts of the director will tie themselves in knots trying to pick the lock of the film; the rest of us can lie back and enjoy the spooking.—*A.L.* (10/15/01) (59th Street East Cinema and Cinema Village.)

NO MAN'S LAND

During the Bosnian war, Ciki (Branko Djuric), a Bosnian, and Nino (Rene Bitorajac), a Serb, two very similar men forced to be enemies, wind up in a trench together between enemy lines. Another soldier is lying nearby on a spring-loaded grenade that will explode, killing everyone, if he moves. The U.N. peacekeepers who arrive on the scene are pompous and ineffective, and the journalists grasping and opportunistic. The writer-director Danis Tanovic has nothing original or even interesting on his mind, but he's made the kind of absurdist war parable that always wins awards and garners good reviews. In Bosnian.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOT ANOTHER TEEN MOVIE

Eminently skippable, despite a sadistic game of dodgeball and other funny throwaway gags. The director Joel Gallen and five screenwriters claim responsibility for this raunchy spoof, an overkill trashing of an exhausted genre (the death rattle began in the early nineties, when teen flicks became arch and self-referential). Gallen uses near-exact locations from eighties teen classics, but it's the soundtrack where the appropriation is the sharpest: just a few chords of Simple Minds creates a longing for the Hughes canon in all its emotive glory.—*Michael Agger* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Steven Soderbergh's remake of the famously lazy Vegas heist movie from 1960 bristles with energy. Instead of the ineffably casual Rat Pack, Soderbergh has a cast of hardworking guys: George Clooney in the old Sinatra role as the criminal mastermind, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle, Andy Garcia, and, in colorful support, Elliott Gould and Carl Reiner. Soderbergh constructs the movie in layers with lines of terse dialogue winging on and off the screen and fitting perfectly together. The robbery itself also depends on many interlocking pieces of theatre—moments of imposture and fakery which allow the gang members to breach the inner sanctum of the casinos. Despite all the cleverness and good humor, however, the movie peters out, and, by the end, you may wonder what it's all for. With Julia Roberts in a senseless role as a magnificently dressed art expert who works as "curator" at the Bellagio.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

PATHS OF GLORY

Just after he made his racetrack-robbery picture "The Killing," Stanley Kubrick directed this 1957 attack on the military mind. The movie has a fascinating jittery quality, especially when Timothy Carey, who's like a precursor of the hipster druggies of the sixties, is on the screen, and the strong liberal-intellectual pitch makes it genuinely controversial. The story is about the class structure within the French army—the aristocratic generals in their spacious, sunlit châteaux and the proletarian soldiers in the dark trenches; trapped between them is Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas), who commiserates with the men but is powerless. The film's rhythm is startling—you can feel the director's temperament. It's an angry film that seems meant to apply to all armies. Watching it is very frustrating: Kubrick, who wrote the script with Calder Willingham and Jim Thompson, doesn't leave you with anything.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Jan. 6-7.)

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS

After the brilliance of "Rushmore," his level-headed look at the gifts of a misfit, where could Wes Anderson go next? In the event, he has broadened his scope to take in an entire family of misfits: the Tenenbaums, residing in their colorful town house like kooky modern leftovers from the age of Edith Wharton—an age of innocence indeed, despite the ill will that gusts around. The parents (Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston) raised three overachieving children (Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and then separated. We are here for the aftermath: the daughter's fading marriage to a bearded melancholic (Bill Murray), and other sunderings and patchings-up. The movie is packed tight with strong, if baffled, feelings, and yet we could be watching it through glass; Anderson specializes in the cool, astringent gaze, and for anyone sick of Hollywood heart-melters, this could be the antidote. With Owen Wilson, who co-wrote the film, and a meticulous Danny Glover.—*A.L.* (12/17/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Stanley Kubrick's slow, precise, yet dreamy 1968 sci-fi epic. The ponderous, blurry appeal of the picture may be in its mystical vision of a graceful world of space, controlled by superior godlike minds, where the hero (Keir Dullea) is reborn as an angelic baby. It says that man is just a tiny nothing on the stairway to paradise; something better (i.e., nonhuman) is coming, and it's all out of your hands anyway. Kubrick's story line—which accounts for evolution by an extraterrestrial intelligence—is probably the most gloriously redundant plot of all time.—*P.K.* (Astor Plaza.)

VANILLA SKY

This Hollywood remake of the 1997 Spanish movie "Abre los Ojos" can only be called *un desastre*. Tom Cruise plays a magazine-empire heir who lives in the Dakota and works (apparently) in the Condé Nast building—he's a playboy publisher splitting his time between Cameron Diaz and Penélope Cruz (who re-creates her role from the original as a tempestuous free spirit). There is an accident, and Cruise winds up charged with murder and disfigured (he sometimes shouts through a plastic mask). The movie jumps in and out of dreams and nightmares, rushes forward and backward, and the only thing that emerges clearly is that a big star is coming to terms with the anxiety of losing his looks. It's one of those rare movies that manage to be overwrought and completely boring. Cameron Crowe, who wrote and directed it, has to begin all over again and figure out why he wanted to be a movie director.—*D.D.* (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

BEHIND THE SUN

Sunshine Cinema.

GOSFORD PARK

Chelsea West.

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE (11/19/01)
Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THE MAJESTIC
Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (11/5/01)
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.

MONSTER'S BALL
Sunshine Cinema.

THE SHIPPING NEWS
BAM Rose Cinemas and First & 62nd Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Jan. 20: A W. C. Fields retrospective. Jan. 5 at 2: "So's Your Old Man" (1926, Gregory La Cava). ♦ Jan. 5 at 4: "You're Telling Me" (1934, Erle Kenton). ♦ Jan. 6 at 2: "Sally of the Sawdust" (1925, D. W. Griffith). ♦ Jan. 6 at 4:30: "Running Wild" (1927, La Cava). ♦ Repertory nights. Jan. 5-6 at 6:30: "The Red Shoes" (1948, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Jan. 4 at 7:30 and Jan. 6 at 3: George Méliès shorts, program I. ♦ Jan. 4 at 9: George Méliès shorts, program II. ♦ Jan. 5 at 7 and 9 and Jan. 6 at 4:30 and 6:30: Restored films by the Lumière brothers.

CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (677-5368)—Jan. 2: "Gate of Hell" (1953, Teinosuke Kinugasa; in Japanese). ♦ Jan. 3: "Jules and Jim" (1962, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ Jan. 5-6: "The 400 Blows" (1959, Truffaut; in French). ♦ Jan. 6: "The Hobbit" (1978, Jules Bass). ♦ Jan. 7-8: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968, Roman Polanski).

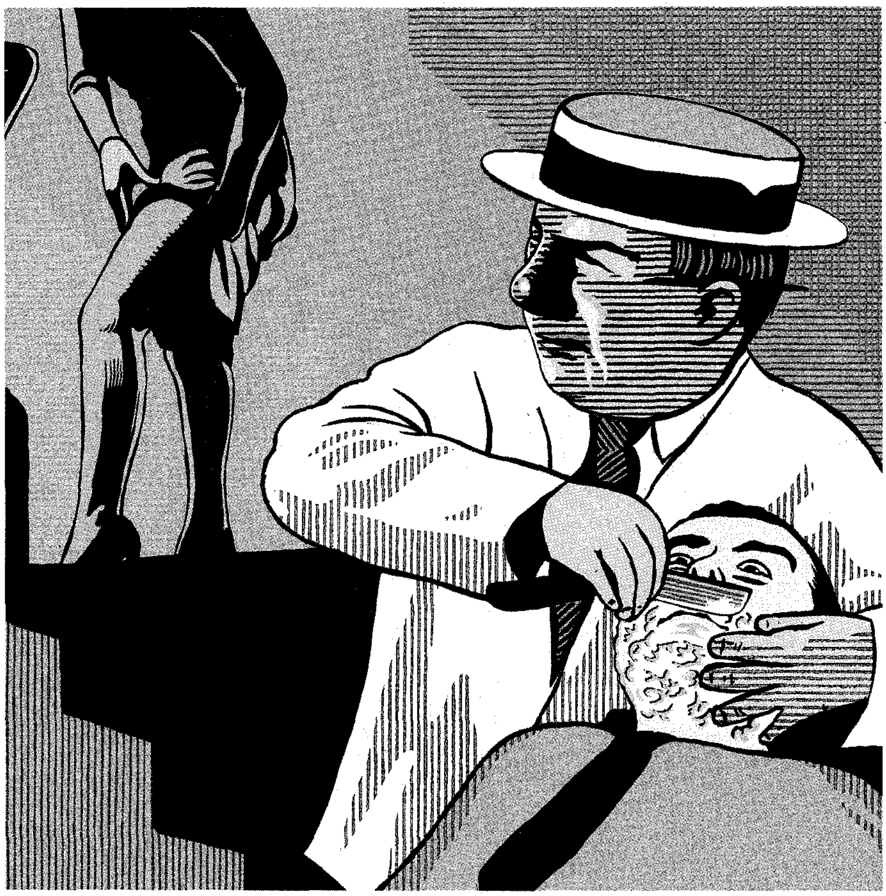
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Feb. 7: "Greatest Hits." Jan. 2 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Double Indemnity" (1944, Billy Wilder). ♦ Jan. 2 at 2:55, 6:35, and 10:15: "The Lady Eve" (1941, Preston Sturges). ♦ Jan. 3-5 at 1:10, 5:30, and 9:50: "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Jan. 3-5 at 3:15 and 7:35: "The Man Who Knew Too Much" (†). ♦ Jan. 6-7 at 1:15, 4:40, and 8:05: "Paths of Glory" (†). ♦ Jan. 6-7 at 2:55, 6:20, and 9:45: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Jan. 8 at 1:35, 5:40, and 9:45: "Written on the Wind" (1956, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Jan. 8 at 3:25 and 7:30: "Imitation of Life" (1959, Sirk).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—The movies of Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Jan. 4 at 6:30: "The City of Lost Children" (1995, with Marc Caro; in French). ♦ Jan. 4 at 9: "Alien: Resurrection" (1997). ♦ Jan. 5 at 7: "Delicatessen" (1991, with Marc Caro; in French). ♦ Jan. 6 at 4: "Amelie" (†). ♦ Films that portray *la vie d'artiste.* Jan. 8 at 12:30 and 6:30: "La Comédie-Française ou l'Amour Joué" (1996, Frederick Wiseman).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—Through Jan. 11: "Brazil on Screen." All films are in Portuguese. Jan. 2 at 7: "Babilônia 2000" (2000, Eduardo Coutinho). ♦ Jan. 4 at 7 and Jan. 5 at 3: "The Triumph of Love" (1997, Djalma Limongi Batista). ♦ Jan. 5 at 7: "Portrait of a Serial Kisser" (1993, Carlos Nader) and "O Amor Natural" (1996, Heddy Honigman).

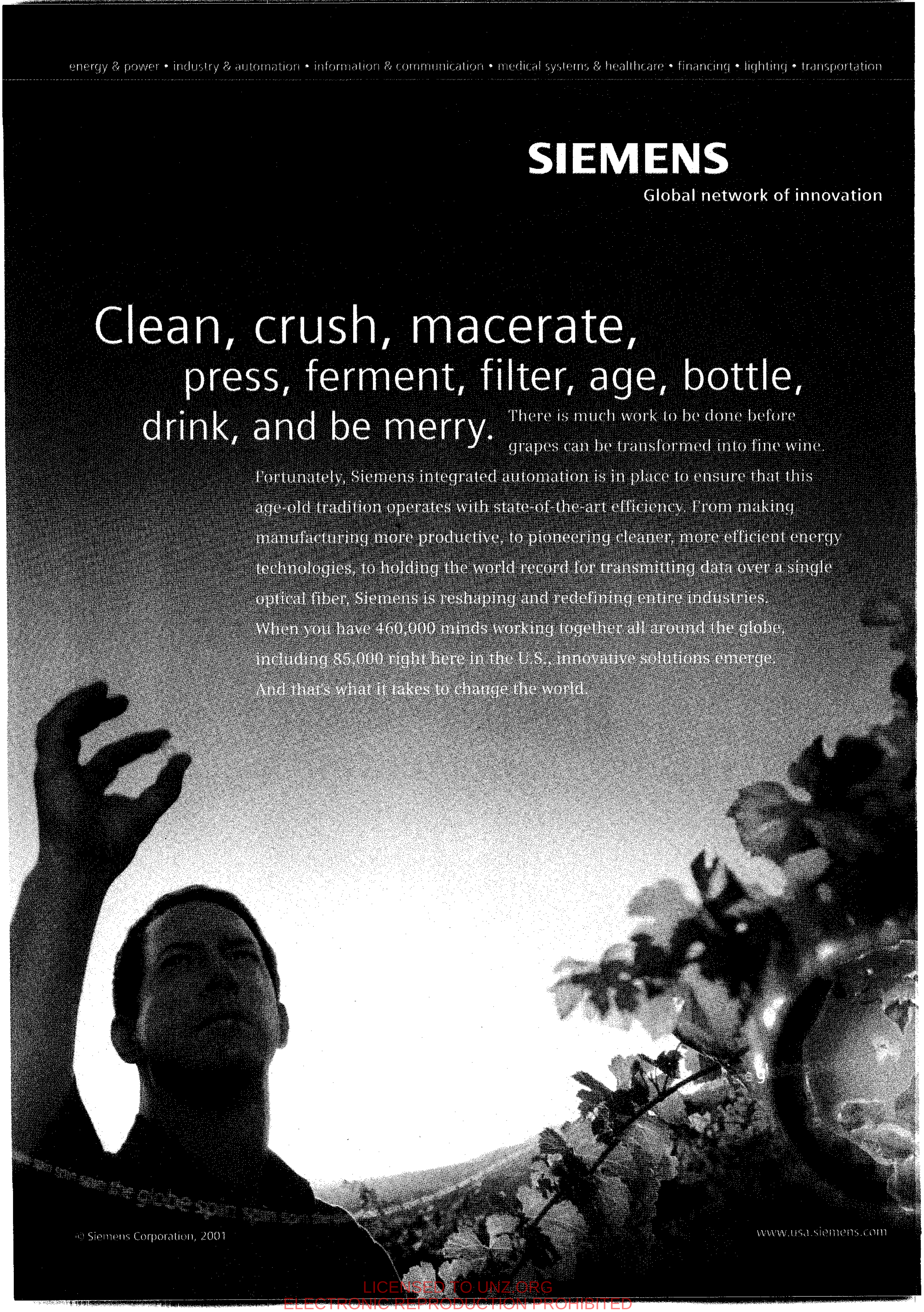
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Jan. 8: "Mauritz Stiller—Restored," a retrospective of the Swedish director's work. Jan. 3 at 2:30 and Jan. 7 at 6: "Song of the Scarlet Flower" (1919). ♦ Jan. 3 at 6 and Jan. 8 at 2:30: "Hotel Imperial" (1927). ♦ Jan. 4 at 2:30 and Jan. 6 at 5: "Love and Journalism" (1916) and "Alexander the Great" (1917). ♦ Jan. 4 at 6:30 and Jan. 6 at 1: "The Atonement of Gösta Berling, Parts I and II" (1924/1934). ♦ Jan. 5 at 2: "Thomas Graal's Best Film" (1917). ♦ Jan. 5 at 5: "Thomas Graal's First Child" (1918). ♦ Jan. 7 at 2:30: "The Treasure of Arne" (1919).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Jan. 10: "Happy Birthday!" Fourteen audience favorites to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the theatre. Jan. 2 at 1:30 and 6:20: "A Matter of Life and Death" (1946, Michael Powell). ♦ Jan. 2 at 4 and 8:30: "Kiss Me Deadly" (†). ♦ Jan. 3 at 1, 5, and 9: "Nobody Will Speak of Us When We're Dead" (1995, Agustín Díaz Yanes; in Spanish). ♦ Jan. 3 at 3:15 and 7:15 and Jan. 4 at 5: "Cold Water" (1994, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ Jan. 4 at 1 and 9 and Jan. 5 at 10: "Jazz on a Summer's Day" (1958, Bert Stern). ♦ Jan. 4 at 2:45 and 6:45: "Goodbye South, Goodbye" (1996, Hou Hsiao-hsien; in Hokkien and Mandarin). ♦ Jan. 5 at 5: "L'Amour Fou" (1968, Jacques Rivette; in French). ♦ Jan. 6 at 1:30 and Jan. 8 at 1: "Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?" (1989, Bae Yong-Kyan; in Korean). ♦ Jan. 6 at 4:15: "Romeo and Juliet" (1965, Paul Czinner). ♦ Jan. 6 at 6:45: "Flirtation" (1932, Max Ophüls; in German). ♦ Jan. 6 at 8:30 and Jan. 8 at 3:45: "A Life Apart" (1996, Menachem Daum and Oren Rudavsky). ♦ Jan. 7 at 6:30 and 9: "South: Ernest Schackleton and the Endurance Adventure" (1919, Frank Hurley).



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

At Moving Image, early W. C. Fields silents with live piano accompaniment.



energy & power • industry & automation • information & communication • medical systems & healthcare • financing • lighting • transportation

SIEMENS
Global network of innovation

Clean, crush, macerate,
press, ferment, filter, age, bottle,
drink, and be merry.

There is much work to be done before grapes can be transformed into fine wine. Fortunately, Siemens integrated automation is in place to ensure that this age-old tradition operates with state-of-the-art efficiency. From making manufacturing more productive, to pioneering cleaner, more efficient energy technologies, to holding the world record for transmitting data over a single optical fiber, Siemens is reshaping and redefining entire industries. When you have 460,000 minds working together all around the globe, including 85,000 right here in the U.S., innovative solutions emerge. And that's what it takes to change the world.

© Siemens Corporation, 2001

www.usa.siemens.com

THE
NEW YORKER

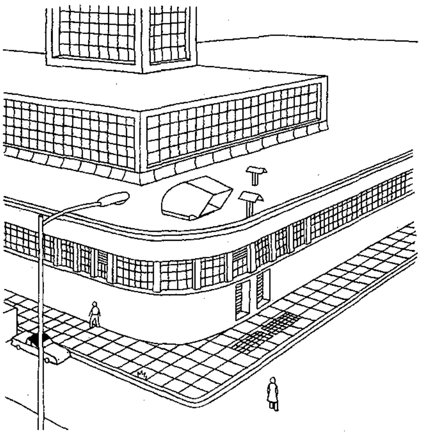
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
A WOMAN'S PREROGATIVE

The women of Afghanistan do not wish to be freed from the strictures of the Taliban only to submit to a Western model of women's liberation, or so various of their representatives have reminded well-meaning American feminists during the past several weeks. "Bring your democracy, not your bikinis" is how Zohra Yusuf Daoud, Miss Afghanistan of 1973, put it to the audience of a recent conference in New York co-sponsored by Women for Afghan Women. In fact, there are a number of women in this country whose theological distaste for the bikini is combined with an appreciation for civil rights: American Muslim feminists. Some of these women read the Koran as a document that secures women's rights rather than as a blueprint for oppression, in spite of the evidence, throughout the Muslim world, of the originality of such an interpretation. The picture they present of God's plan for women is not quite consistent with American-style equality; instead, it suggests that the Muslim woman would be the most pampered, privileged creature on the planet, if only she knew her due.

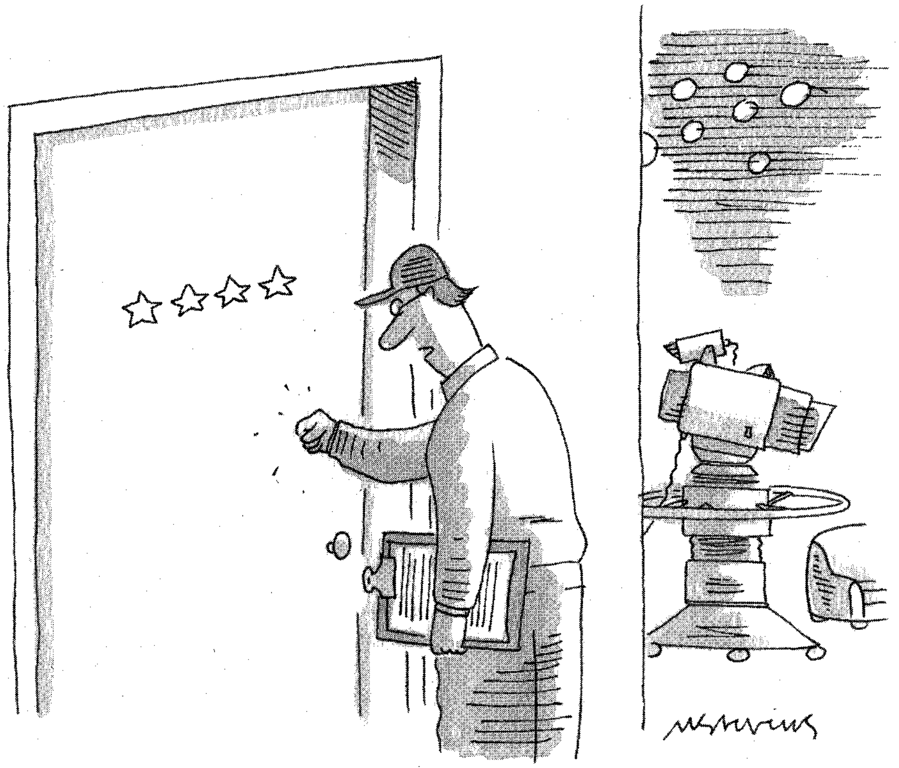
LAURENT CILLUFFO

Azizah al-Hibri, a Lebanese-American professor of law at the University of Richmond, in Virginia, who is an expert in the prenuptial contract that traditionally regulates every Muslim marriage, argues that, according to Islamic jurisprudence based on the Koran, the contract can be used as an instrument by which a woman can lay out her expectations about the shape she would like her marriage, and thus her life, to take. "It goes back to the very early days of Islam, when it was understood that women entered marriage equally, unlike previous regimes, in which she was chattel," al-Hibri says. A woman can secure her right to work outside the home at any job she likes; she can reassert her right to have her husband support her financially, even if she has a job or is independently wealthy; she can keep her finances separate from his and invest them wherever she wishes; she can specify the sum of money she expects to receive should the marriage end in divorce or should she be widowed; she can negotiate the right to divorce her husband at will, should he, for example, take another wife; she can reserve the right not to cook, to clean, or to nurse her own children.



Some American Muslim women even argue that Islam anticipates the demands of Western feminists by more than a thousand years: a stay-at-home wife can specify that she expects to receive a regular stipend, which is not that far from the goals of the Wages for Housework campaign of the nineteen-seventies. Elsewhere, the fully empowered Muslim woman sounds like a self-assured, post-feminist type—a woman who draws her inspiration from the example of Sukayna, the brilliant, beautiful great-granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, who was married several times, and, at least once, stipulated in writing that her husband was forbidden to disagree with her about anything. All these conditions are based on the canon of Islam and on early Muslim practice, al-Hibri says, but they are rarely applied, since centuries of male-dominated culture have so obscured the essential equality of the sexes at the core of Islamic marriage that a woman's failure to include these provisions in the marriage contract can be understood as implying that she has waived them.

For non-Muslims who fret about the high divorce rate in this country, the concept of a negotiated marital contract that makes explicit the financial, social,



"Five minutes, General."

• •

and even sexual expectations that each partner brings to the union has a certain appeal. Although wealthy Americans may have discovered the usefulness of the prenup, the dominant view of marriage in American culture is that it is a largely romantic endeavor rather than an arrangement based, at least in part, on pragmatism. Unfortunately, most Islamic marriages bear about as much relation to this paradigm as most American marriages bear to a Nora Ephron movie. Marriage contracts generally go no further than specifying the size of the bride's *mahr*—a sort of dowry the groom must pay her—because many Muslim women are ill-informed of their rights, and, even if they do know them, lack the financial and social leverage to assert them. Things are even tougher for a woman who might prefer not to marry, or is obliged to remain single. And al-Hibri's pro-woman readings of the Koran are, at times, less than persuasive: in a recent essay for the *Journal of Law & Religion*, she acknowledges that the Koran permits a husband to beat his wife, though she argues that a correct reading of the verse indicates that he should use nothing more injurious than a *miswak*, a twig that commonly serves as a toothbrush in the Arabian peninsula.

A group of Muslim women in Washington, among them Sima Wali, a delegate to the Afghan conference in Bonn last month, has been drawing up a list of legislative recommendations for a reconstructed Afghanistan, including a woman's right to vote and her right of access to medical treatment. Also included is the suggestion that girls receive marriage-contract education in the schools when, as it is hoped, they return to them in the spring. If a particularly bright young Afghan girl should ask why, if Islam is predicated on equality and harmony between the sexes, a woman should be advised to load her contract with conditions that restrict her husband's capacity to exploit her, al-Hibri has an answer. "The way I explain it is that God understands patriarchy, because God created man," she says. "He realized immediately that women need affirmative action." American feminists have never been particularly celebrated for a sense of irony; Afghan feminists, assuredly, will need one.

—*Rebecca Mead*

BUILDING DEPT.
SPIFFING UP THE GRAY LADY

Before last month, you could believe that the *Times* was never going to go through with it. Yes, the paper had sponsored a major architectural competition a year and a half ago for its new headquarters, on Eighth Avenue, but the design it selected—a shimmering tower of transparent glass by Renzo Piano—was the last thing you would expect to be built by a conservative corporation, let alone the one that publishes America's most serious newspaper. This was a skyscraper for Gianni Agnelli, maybe, but not for Arthur Sulzberger. But, then again, the Arthur Sulzberger who is in charge of the *Times* today is not the Arthur Sulzberger who was in charge of the paper a generation ago, when it redid its newsroom with fake-wood Formica furniture and orange carpeting. Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., who took over as chairman of the New York Times Company in 1997, has an eye for design, and he saw the disjunction between the way the *Times* has regarded its own surroundings and the way the paper's critics preach the virtues of great architecture for other people.

Still, even if Sulzberger was behind Piano's unusual skyscraper, he and his colleagues had to figure out how to get the design approved by the city and state agencies that oversee the Forty-second Street development project, and convince the paper's partner, the real-estate developer Forest City Ratner, that the fifty-two-story tower would attract tenants for the upper floors. After September 11th, when almost every corporation became architecture-phobic, the *Times* would have had an easy excuse to fold up its glass tent, send Piano back home to Genoa, and build something ordinary, or nothing at all.

What nobody expected was the splashiest announcement of a new skyscraper since Donald Trump gave us Trump World Tower. The *Times* building is the biggest project to be unveiled in New York since the destruction of the World Trade Center, and it would have drawn plenty of attention even if it had been just another corporate box. When the *Times* held a press conference to reveal the final plan for the building, which Piano designed in association with the New York firm Fox & Fowle, Governor George Pataki showed up to hail it as "creative and brilliant," and Bruce Ratner, the president of Forest City Ratner, repeatedly referred to the tower as "really pretty."

The true sign that the *Times* had got religion about architecture was the way Renzo Piano, and not one of the *Times* executives or public officials who were present, turned out to be the star of the show. Piano, who has a gray beard and never seems entirely comfortable in a business suit, speaks with a mellifluous Italian accent. Even though he was trained as an engineer, he is probably better than any architect at convincing people that buildings are not just objects of shelter but exercises in poetry. For fifteen minutes, he held his audience rapt as he explained the rationale of the building, which is to be a slender tower of transparent glass, sheathed in a webbing of white ceramic rods that will form a protective sunscreen.

"For no reason, I prefer things that are light," Piano said, sauntering back and forth beside a set of renderings and floor plans, on easels, and a six-foot-high model of the building. "An architect fights all his life against gravity—this is our destiny, a building that is light and transparent and vibrant. It is like it is breathing, and it keeps changing. . . . Architecture is, of course, about making buildings, but it is also about telling stories, and the story I hope this building tells is not about arrogance and power. I hope this building will tell a story about transparency and lightness."

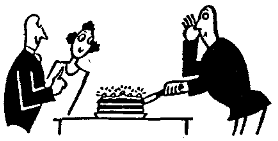
The outer mesh of ceramic will give the tower a soft texture and make it appear almost like mist against the sky. Piano said the rods would look like lace, and at one point he spoke of his desire to juxtapose "the 'precarity' of the lace and the strength of the steel." He thought for a moment, and then turned to Michael Golden, the Times company's vice-chairman, and said, "Don't worry, Mike. The lace won't really be precarious."

Piano had to make some adjustments to his earlier design in order to both survive the city's ruthless approval process and convince the *Times* and the developer of its practicality. The original tower was to have been cantilevered over an open piazza, but it will now rise directly up from Eighth Avenue, and behind it there will be a low wing, wrapped around a garden, containing the *Times'* newsroom. And Piano has come up with a new top: another garden with full-size trees and a three-hundred-foot-high central mast, which will sway slightly in the wind.

"Renzo absolutely demanded the garden and the mast," Bruce Fowle, one of the architects, said. "The mast has no function—it is kinetic sculpture. Renzo says it gives you something to love."

—Paul Goldberger

SHOW BUSINESS
A CAREER IN CAKE



On a recent Sunday afternoon, a hundred and fifty show-business veterans and variety-show stalwarts celebrated the fiftieth birthday of the talent manager Billy Sammeth, at Leisure Time Bowling, in the Port Authority Bus Terminal. "For my thirtieth, I was in Australia with Cher," he said. "We used to travel with seventy-five people." For his fortieth, Sammeth rented a dude ranch in Santa Barbara, California. For his fiftieth, he was throwing three bowling parties, this being the second. A week earlier, he'd hosted two hundred and fifty of his friends, family, and clients—including Florence Henderson, Steve Guttenberg, and the manager Sandy Gallin, who is Sammeth's former boss—at the AMF Bayshore Lanes, in Santa Monica. Sammeth is in the process of planning the third party, which will be held next month in London.

"Let's all thank KC and the Sunshine Band; they're paying for this," Sammeth said to his guests as they arrived at Leisure Time. They signed a commemorative bowling pin, put on "Billy's Bowling Bash" shirts, and headed for the lanes. On their way past the shoe-rental counter, they saw the birthday cake, a four-foot-square confectionery Monopoly board that featured, in place of the usual Atlantic City street names, references to various highlights of Sammeth's life and career. "It's my life in cake," he announced. The first moment etched in icing was his birth, in Brooklyn in 1951, but the historic events of his years at P.S. 152 and his bar mitzvah were outnumbered by such milestones as "Osmonds' PR," "MGM Records," "Joins Katz-Gallin," "Bill Sammeth Organization—Collect 15%," "Billy Signs Joan Rivers," "Billy Signs Cher," "Billy Signs Olivia Newton-John," "Cher Fires Billy," "Cher Rehires Billy Four Days Later," and "Cher Hires and Fires Billy Ten Times in Ten Years."

Much of the talk, like the cake, had to do with Cher. "In 1980, she decided she didn't need any of us," Sammeth said, over the sound of a few pins falling.

"She said she'd only take us back if we would buy her four pairs of Maude Frizon shoes, the Manolos of their time," Elle Shushan, one of Cher's many former agents, said. "We're so much better off without her, so much better off."

Adrienne Angel, Cher's longtime vocal coach, added, "She's an exotic and strange creature. What can I say?"

Sammeth introduced Jim Jerome, of *People*, who has written a half-dozen cover stories about Cher. "We have abused this man for twenty years," Sam-

Joan Rivers

TOM BACHTELL

meth said. "This man has followed her around. We've left him in places. We have called him a liar; we've said many things about this man."

Jerome said, "The only person over the years who has been abused more by Cher is—"

Sammeth interrupted him: "It's on the cake. You'll see. I left no punches out."

Joan Rivers arrived late, wearing a fur boa and dangerous heels. "I think it's great for a whole bunch of Jews to bowl on Hanukkah," she said, as she greeted Sammeth with a kiss. "What a great way to get together—the festival of bowling."

"You're not bowling," Sammeth told her. "Do you think I want to be responsible for the injury of America's premier monologist?"

Before long, the guests—including Paul Shaffer, Peter Noone, of Herman's Hermits, and Kenny Solms, the former producer of "The Carol Burnett Show"—grew tired of bowling. Everyone gathered around Sammeth to sing "Happy Birthday."

"I'm too cheap to cut the cake," Sammeth whispered. "I froze my bar-mitzvah cake for twelve years."

But Sammeth went ahead and cut the cake, and handed pieces to his guests. He took the piece with his birth date and gave Rivers "Meets Osmond Brothers." Later, no one could recall who got "Cher Fires Billy for the 25th Time."

—*Andy Young*

POSTSCRIPT
W. G. SEBALD

The writer W. G. Sebald died in a car crash on December 14th. His daughter Anna was badly injured in the same accident. For many people who knew his work, the initial reaction to this news was *not* sadness—the emotion that Sebald himself dealt in with such distinction, and of which, in his capacity as a naturalist of human loss, he seemed to collect new and delicate species—but the more strident one of outrage. How dare the Fates expunge, as if with a sharp frost, this talent that was agreed to be in full flower? No life deserves to be cut short, but the injustice in this case approached the monstrous. There was only one person with a wisdom rueful enough to appreciate not just the tragedy but the ridiculous irony of the event, and that, unfortunately, was the deceased.

Then there were the circumstances: Sebald was killed at the wheel of a car. It seems such a hopeless setting. Rightly or wrongly, fans of "The Emigrants," "The Rings of Saturn," "Vertigo," and "Austerlitz" associate him with the tram, the train, and the swaying boat: all the conveyances of a Europe that was not quite up to speed with our craving for unchecked communication, and that spoke instead of a civilized obsession with moseying, meandering, and delay. And yet turn to "The Emigrants"—Sebald's first book to be translated into English, and still, to many readers, his best—and you find the narrator, in the opening sentence, driving through the English countryside. Far from being a throwback, Sebald was a modern figure to his fingertips, or wherever the nerves are most exposed; if deracination is the most pressing of modern themes, then few suffer it more graciously than Sebald's characters, who are doomed both to look homeward and never to arrive. His publications radiate not a reactionary disgust with the world but, instead, an irrepressible wish to enrich the present by digging below its crust—to direct our gaze, as though we were standing before a cliff face, at the compacted strata of history.

Sebald's reputation is one of such high, off-putting seriousness that the record needs to be set straight: he was, on the page as elsewhere, a good companion, and his province was not the ivory tower but the crinkled photograph album and the muddy track. And, just because his narrators could be comically depressed or scarily well read, that is no reason not to follow their musings; for Sebald, like an unexpected guest at a funeral, made it his business to extend elaborate sympathy—toward the bereaved, the dispossessed, and the plain peculiar. In one paragraph of "Austerlitz," he even declares his pity for dead moths.

The tensions, however, will not be dissolved by his death. Sebald was born in Germany in 1944, and he continued to write in German, but he had lived in England, on and off, since 1966; each of his books was recounted in the first person, and all of them delve into provable facts, yet they sit more happily on a shelf of novels than among the memoirs of lesser confessors. And what about his age? He died at fifty-seven, although the camera always added a few lugubrious years, helped by a drooping mustache; but fame arrived late ("The Emigrants" wasn't published here until he was past fifty), and it is neither vague nor sentimental to suggest that his most extraordinary writings—those restive mental travellings for which Sebald alone had the timetable and the tickets—lay ahead of him. We are lucky that another book, "Luftkrieg und Literatur," a nonfictional inquiry into the Allied bombing of Germany, awaits translation, and its subject comes as no surprise; though steeped in the everyday, Sebald never shied from the infernal. His most recent work in English, "Austerlitz," was his most sorrowful to date (the title refers not to a battle but to a Jewish refugee, raised in rural Wales). It came loaded with the details of dissolution, and with the opposing urge to preserve:

> She was carrying a large bunch of rust-colored chrysanthemums in the crook of her right arm, and when we had walked side by side across the yard without a word and were standing in the doorway, she raised her free hand and put the hair back from my forehead, as if she knew, in this one gesture, that she had the gift of being remembered.

She wasn't the only one. Now that Sebald is gone, who will notice such moments? Who will catch the quick gesture, or the throwaway line, and configure it into something more mysterious?

It is not just the fast-burning youths, Keats or Marlowe, whose extinction we regret, but those who were set to darken slowly into Old Masters; Sebald was as ready as Rembrandt to inspect the progress of our flesh. Nobody, least of all literary reviewers, has a clue who will be reading what two centuries from now, and if anyone was modest enough to reckon on the decay of his own name, it was W. G. Sebald; nevertheless, his untimely end is as good a time as any to place your bets.

—*Anthony Lane*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE DREADED DOWNGRADE

Of all the things you can do on Wall Street, being an analyst for a credit-rating agency hardly qualifies as the most glamorous. Rating analysts don't stride trading floors and bark buy orders into headsets. They don't fly on Gulfstream jets to close billion-dollar deals. They don't get star turns on "Squawk Box" or the treatment from Tom Wolfe. And yet they may be the true Masters of the Universe.

One morning in mid-October, a Standard & Poor's "rating committee"—made up of a dozen or so senior analysts—gathered in a conference room on Wall Street to decide whether to lower the credit rating of General Motors. S. & P.'s auto-industry group had produced a rigorous report on G.M.'s finances, emphasizing the company's shrinking market share, excess capacity, and declining profitability. The analysts pored over the report, then put the company's fate to a vote. By noon, S. & P. had downgraded G.M.

In bond argot, the downgrade dropped G.M.'s "commercial paper" credit rating from A-1 to A-2. That may not sound like much, but it hit G.M. like an asteroid. It essentially froze the automaker out of the $1.4-trillion market for commercial paper, which is short-term, low-interest debt—a crucial source of cash for major corporations. The largest holders of commercial paper are money-market mutual funds, and they are barred by the Securities and Exchange Commission from investing more than five per cent of their assets in second-tier debt like G.M.'s. Shut out of that market, G.M. has had to tap other, more expensive sources of capital and rejigger much of its financing structure. S. & P.'s decision will, by one estimate, cost the company up to three hundred million dollars.

G.M.'s predicament is not unusual. We are living in the season of the downgrade. With the economy in recession, hardly a day goes by without S. & P. or its chief rival, Moody's Investors Service, demoting someone's creditworthiness. Recently, they've put the last nail in Enron's coffin, sent K mart's stock reeling, nudged Argentina closer to collapse, and placed the health of the energy industry in doubt. The real authority on Wall Street, it is clear, belongs to the dour assessors at Moody's and S. & P.

We tend to take this authority for granted, if we bother to notice it at all. Credit ratings help determine whom companies—and countries—can borrow from, and how much interest they must pay. Without a rating, it's nearly impossible for corporations to sell bonds or commercial paper. And to get a rating they have little choice but to buy one from S. & P. and Moody's. In effect, two commercial enterprises (S. & P. is a division of McGraw-Hill, and Moody's was recently spun off by Dun & Bradstreet) serve as gatekeepers to the American debt market. As a result, they catch a lot of flak. Corporate C.E.O.s say that the agencies are too quick to downgrade, and investors complain that they're too slow. But such are the burdens of power.

So where does such influence come from? S. & P. and Moody's like to say that they're in the information business and that their power derives from the quality of their analysis. In court cases, they have successfully argued that they are members of the press. But, in fact, they are closer to the F.D.A. than to *Barron's*. They are the platypuses of the financial world: private entities that wield public power.

That power originated in 1975, when, in the midst of a credit crisis, the S.E.C. quietly designated S. & P. and Moody's (as well as a smaller rival, Fitch Investors Service) as Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organizations. The government wanted official credit ratings, but, instead of doing the work itself, it picked these three lucky companies for the job, anointing them reliable sources—*the* reliable sources—of credit analysis.

In the years that followed, the S.E.C. and Congress depended on the companies to regulate the debt market in various ways, and so this designation became more and more important. As a result, S. & P. and Moody's grew bigger, more profitable, and more powerful. When S. & P. downgrades a company today, it isn't just voicing an opinion, as a film critic or a securities analyst might. It is issuing a verdict that often has legally binding ramifications.

The opinions themselves are generally sound. It's just that the effect of a downgrade is out of proportion to the information it conveys. The S.E.C.'s reliance on the rating agencies has concentrated a remarkable amount of power in a few hands: a dozen unelected and unregulated guys sitting in a room can decide the fiscal fate of a behemoth like General Motors.

But do S. & P. and Moody's know more than the rest of us? Eighty years ago, they were often the only source of information about many of the companies they followed. Today, however, the average money manager—with his Bloomberg terminal, his myriad databases, the Net, and S.E.C. filings—is deluged with information, and plenty of Wall Street firms have bond analysts who can talk your ear off about the cash flow of Midwestern sorghum producers. The bond market does a bang-up job on its own of measuring and predicting credit risk. Usually, a downgrade only confirms what investors already know. But, when S. & P. and Moody's speak, the government looms in the background, whispering, "Their word is law." Talk has become cheap on Wall Street. Fortunately, for S. & P. and Moody's, a credit rating hasn't.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Sublime...
Luxury Barge Cruises

FRENCH COUNTRY WATERWAYS, LTD.
P.O. Box 2195, Duxbury, MA 02331
800-222-1236 781-934-2454

architecture · landscape architecture
urban planning & design

DESIGN AT HARVARD

Harvard University
Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
617.495.5453
www.gsd.harvard.edu/cardisc/b.html

career discovery program
June 24–August 2, 2002

For people considering career choices or changes

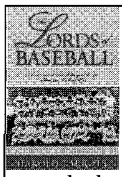
IMAGE: LISSETTE MÉNDEZ, MAUD '00

STAY IN ANGUILLA FOR FREE

Well, not totally free but make a reservation at the luxurious Sonesta Beach Resort & Villas and the 4th night is free! Rates from just $295. Certain restrictions apply. Contact your travel planner or **1-800-SONESTA**

THIS IS WHAT YOU CAME TO FIND.

Sonesta Beach Resort & Villas
Anguilla www.sonesta.com



THE LORDS OF BASEBALL
By Harold Parrott
- A "laugh out loud" history book about Brooklyn
- Recommended by Red Smith, Dave Anderson and Ralph Branca

www.lordsofbaseball.com 1-800-218-4086

SANDCASTLES ARE ONLY FOUND ON BEACHES

The villas at Sonesta offer 4 and 5 bedroom beachfront homes, private pools and terraces, luxurious accommodations, privacy, and yes lots of beach. You just found your sandcastle. For reservations call your travel planner or **1-800-SONESTA** www.sonesta.com/anguilla

The Villas at Sonesta Beach
Anguilla

U.S. JOURNAL

WHO KILLED CAROL JENKINS?

What a thirty-three-year-old murder has done to a town.

BY MARK SINGER

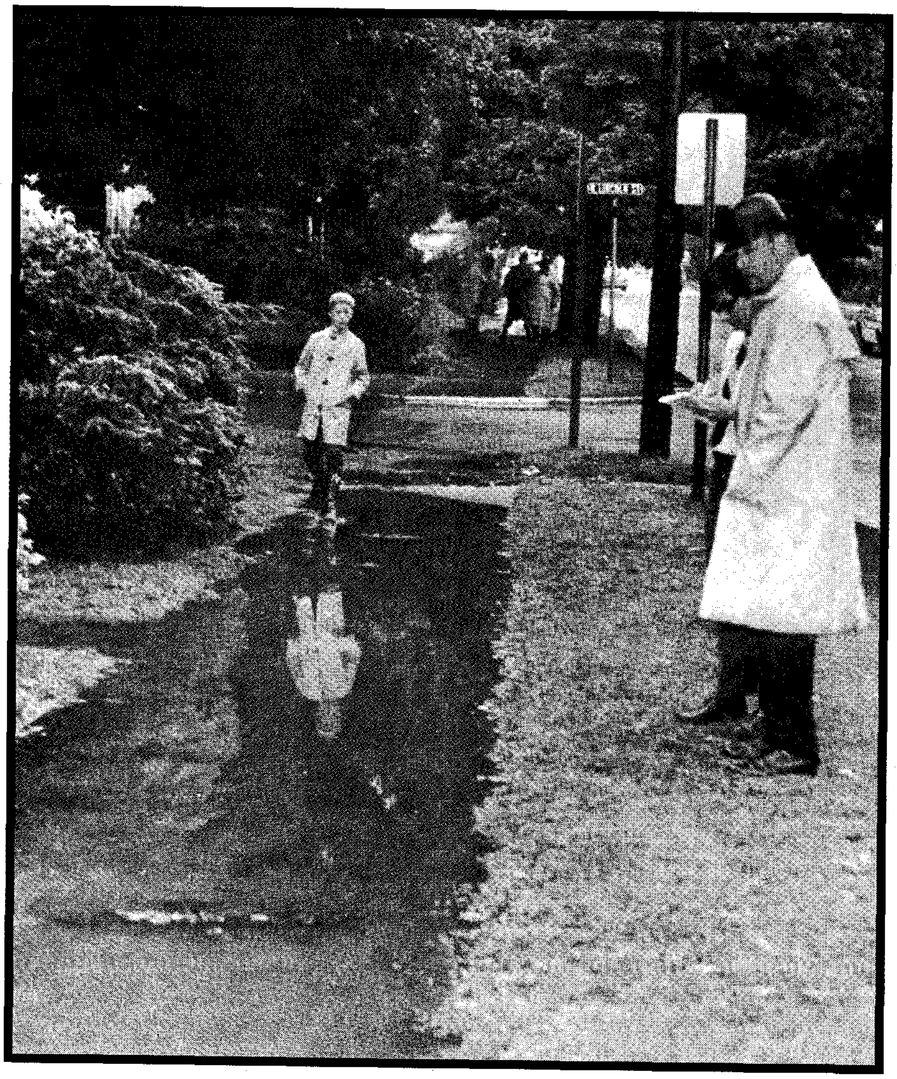
MARTINSVILLE, INDIANA

Carol Jenkins arrived in Martinsville, Indiana, on the foggy and damp afternoon of what proved to be nobody in that town's lucky day. This was September 16, 1968. Although no one in Martinsville was able to get to know her well, thirty-three years later most of its adult population remains familiar with certain vital facts about Carol Jenkins's brief and abrupt experiences there. She was twenty-one years old, a shy, polite, slender, and pretty woman. As the newspapers in Martinsville and Indianapolis reported at the time, "She was a Negro," or "a Negro girl." Growing up in the rural community of Rushville, Indiana, she had nurtured an adolescent fantasy of moving to Chicago and pursuing a career as a fashion model. That dream, however, metamorphosed into the reality of an assembly-line position in a factory that made large appliances. If the factory hadn't been idled by a strike, she wouldn't have taken the job that brought her to Martinsville—selling encyclopedias door-to-door. Or, perhaps, had she and her co-workers not got a late start, they might have been able to reach their intended destination of Vincennes, ninety miles farther down the road, and therefore wouldn't have bothered canvassing in Martinsville—then a working-class town of ten thousand, situated about forty minutes southwest of Indianapolis. Or, had she consulted and heeded her stepfather, Carol Jenkins never would have set foot in Martinsville, in which case she might very well still be alive.

I recall, more than a decade ago, while reporting a story in Indiana, hearing Martinsville mentioned tangentially and being told that it had an all-white population and that black people made a point of not stopping there. That was my first encounter with the legend of Martinsville—the notion that it's a racist town where no African-American, much less a solitary and attractive African-American woman, would want to be caught after dark. In the years since, Martinsville's civic burden has, in many respects, worsened. Discussing Martinsville with reporters from other Indiana cities, I've found that the conversation never gets very far before references to the Ku Klux Klan creep in. Last August, an Indianapolis *Star* columnist named Ruth Holladay wrote a couple of stories about Carol Jenkins and described Martinsville as having been, in 1968, "a Ku Klux Klan stronghold." Seeing the name of their town and those three "K"s in the same context invariably evokes a complex reaction from the town's loyalists—a mixture of anger, frustration, denial, and weariness, nourished by a suspicion that the rest of the world is inexplicably determined to punish Martinsville for transgressions it had nothing to do with.

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to the history of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, especially to the nineteen-twenties, when the Klan there was more active than in any other state. In some towns, between forty and fifty per cent of the native-born white men paid the Klan's ten-dollar membership fee; statewide, the figure averaged almost thirty per cent. In 1923, the city of Kokomo, population thirty thousand, hospitably welcomed a national convention of a hundred thousand Klansmen and their families. The Indiana Klan had a distinct political agenda to go along with its anti-immigrant, anti-black, anti-Catholic dogmatism, and at its peak, after the elections of 1924, it controlled the state Republican Party. Klan-endorsed candidates were elected to the governorship, the majority of both houses of the legislature, and almost all the congressional seats. The steep decline that followed was caused by political corruption and infighting and by the 1925 conviction of Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson on charges of rape and second-degree murder. The last reported racial lynching in Indiana took place in 1930, in the city of Marion.

But in Morgan County, where Martinsville is the county seat, something lingers. On a visit there not long ago, I met with Joanne Raetz Stuttgen, a local resident and a doctoral candidate in folklore at Indiana University. When I asked about the present-day relevance of the Klan, she said, "When I travel and people say to me, 'Oh, Martinsville. That's the headquarters of the K.K.K.,' I tell them, 'Listen. Martinsville's so disorganized it couldn't be the headquarters of anything.'" In 1995, a local bank underwrote the publication of a boosterish pictorial history of Martinsville and enlisted Stuttgen to provide the text. She knew better than to duck the issue of race, but she put it off until the very end—a two-page coda entitled "The Legend We Live With," in which she maintained that, whatever Morgan County's Klan infatuation might have been seventy years earlier, it amounted to "no more than other Indiana counties." Martinsville, Stuttgen suggested, was itself a "minority victim: a small, all-white central Indiana town maligned for its supposed racism just as minorities themselves are maligned." Rather than attempting to pin down how that had come to be, she posed a double-edged rhetorical question: "That Martinsville—or any town—should become the scapegoat for America's painful sensitivity about its racist and supremacist past is not so unusual. But why Martinsville?"



The street where Jenkins, a young black woman selling encyclopedias, was found.

COURTESY THE REPORTER-TIMES

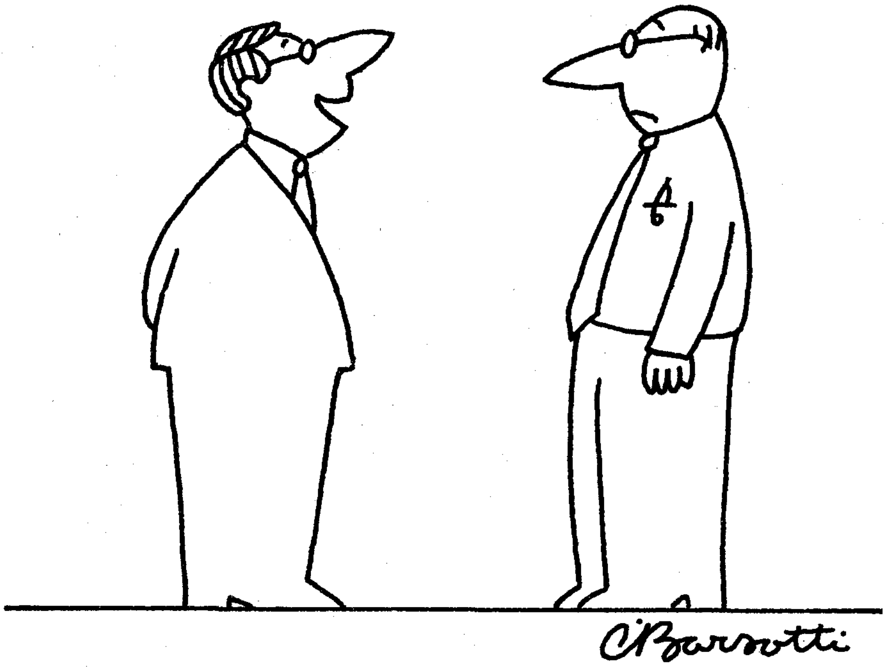
When Paul Davis married Elizabeth Gooden, in 1949, her daughter, Carol Jenkins, was a toddler. Referring to Carol's natural father, Davis told me, "She went to see him when she was fifteen or sixteen, but she called me Daddy." Together, the Davises had five more children, two boys and three girls, and he regarded Carol, no less than the others, as his own. The family resided in Rushville, a classic corn-and-soybeans farming community an hour east of Indianapolis, where Davis has spent his entire life. For forty-eight years, he worked as a machine repairman at a Ford Motor Company plant. Now in his mid-seventies, he lives alone—the Davises divorced in 1967—in an impeccably kept three-bedroom house that he built himself.

As a child in Rushville, where blacks made up about three per cent of the population, Davis attended integrated schools, with no ill consequences. "I never really had any problems," he said. "Myself, I've always been real respected here." During the forties, when he was in high school, a black friend went to Martinsville to play in a basketball game and reported afterward that he'd been verbally harassed. Martinsville was more than seventy miles away, and Davis had never had reason to visit. But he filed away that information and remembered it two decades later, in the fall of 1967, when a group of Rushville football fans decided to make the trip to watch a game. Davis was reluctant, but his older son, Larry—Carol's half brother—was Rushville's star running back, so he went. What he witnessed in Martinsville appalled him. "They called Larry all kinds of names," he told me. "It wasn't just the players—it was the fans, too. When he had the ball, there was a lot of 'Get that nigger!' Or stuff about 'that darky.' And it wasn't just the kids. Some of those adults was just as bad." Davis vowed never to return.

Evidently, Carol never got the message. Or it's possible that she did but felt uncomfortable with the thought of telling her supervisor, on what happened to be her first day of work, that she was afraid to knock on doors in a benign-looking little city. There was, after all, nothing particularly striking about Martinsville, a nineteenth-century settlement that gave the impression of having moseyed indifferently into the twentieth. In the decades since the Depression, a number of enterprises, including the many "health spas," or sanatoriums, that materialized after the discovery there of artesian wells in the eighteen-eighties, had been dwindling toward extinction. The most conspicuous landmarks were the old sanatoriums, several churches, and a grand red brick Italianate courthouse that occupied the central square.

It was 4:30 P.M. when Carol and the

coroner, who had already conducted an autopsy. The killer had punctured her heart.



"I can't believe it—a punk like me laying off an industry legend like you."

• •

In the years since, the mystery of how Carol Jenkins died, the whodunit, has competed with the mystery of why the whodunit has never been solved. The official investigation had, at best, an inauspicious beginning. The Martinsville Police Department employed no detective-grade personnel, so the county sheriff and the Indiana State Police were summoned immediately, which turned out to be too late. Not the least complication was that the crime scene had not been secured, mainly because it wasn't clear that a crime had occurred until Carol was examined at the hospital. Don Kuster, the first state-police detective to work on the case, told me that, when he arrived, "there were about fifty people hanging around the crime scene. One of them came up and handed me a pair of glasses and said, 'I think these are her glasses.' Somebody else handed me her notebook." (The notebook had been lying near the entrance to an auto-repair shop, more than half a block from where she fell.) That it was raining steadily didn't help matters. The dark-colored automobile that had been trailing her before she sought refuge with the Neals was tracked down. Its teen-age driver and a friend admitted having followed Carol but denied having yelled at her; before long, the police decided they weren't suspects. Because Don Neal hadn't accurately remembered the license number of the light-colored sedan, that lead never went anywhere. No murder weapon was ever found.

Out-of-town journalists who came to Martinsville discovered that information was remarkably hard to come by. "The town became a clam," an Indianapolis newspaper reporter told me. "I got the impression real quickly that there was something funny. I began knocking on doors to see if anyone had seen this gal, and I got nothing from the townspeople. After a while, we learned that nothing was going to happen. And, even if somebody knew something, they were afraid to talk. They really didn't want outsiders coming around. It cooled and cooled, until it was futile. So we ended up just making routine calls, and when you called you got the standard 'The investigation is continuing.' You knew if

other members of her sales crew—another young black woman from Rushville and two white men from Indianapolis, one of whom was the supervisor—reached Martinsville. They selected a residential area east of downtown—mostly tidy neighborhoods of brick bungalows and two-story wooden frame houses—and split up, agreeing to rendezvous at ten o'clock at a gas station not far from the square. Around seven-thirty, when it had been dark for about a half hour, Carol knocked at the door of a couple named Don and Norma Neal and apologetically explained that she was frightened. Some men in a dark sedan were following her and had yelled at her, she said, though she couldn't make out what they were saying. When Don Neal went outside, he didn't see the car she had described, but an unfamiliar light-colored sedan was parked near his house. The car's parking lights were on, but he couldn't see the occupants. He approached, and got close enough to make a mental note of the license number. As he returned to the house, the car drove away.

The Neals telephoned the Martinsville Police Department, which dispatched a patrolman, who stuck around for about ten minutes, long enough for Carol to repeat her story. After he departed, Norma Neal drove Carol around the neighborhood for several minutes in an unsuccessful effort to spot one of the other salespeople. Back at the Neals', Carol turned down their offer to remain with them until it was time to rejoin her colleagues. "We tried to get her to stay. But she said she had been a bother long enough," Norma Neal told a reporter. "That sounds like her," Paul Davis reflected, thirty-three years later. "I always felt like she was a very sweet, sort of naïve girl. She had a smile for everybody. She never was in no kind of trouble, never gave me no trouble. Carol didn't like imposing on anybody."

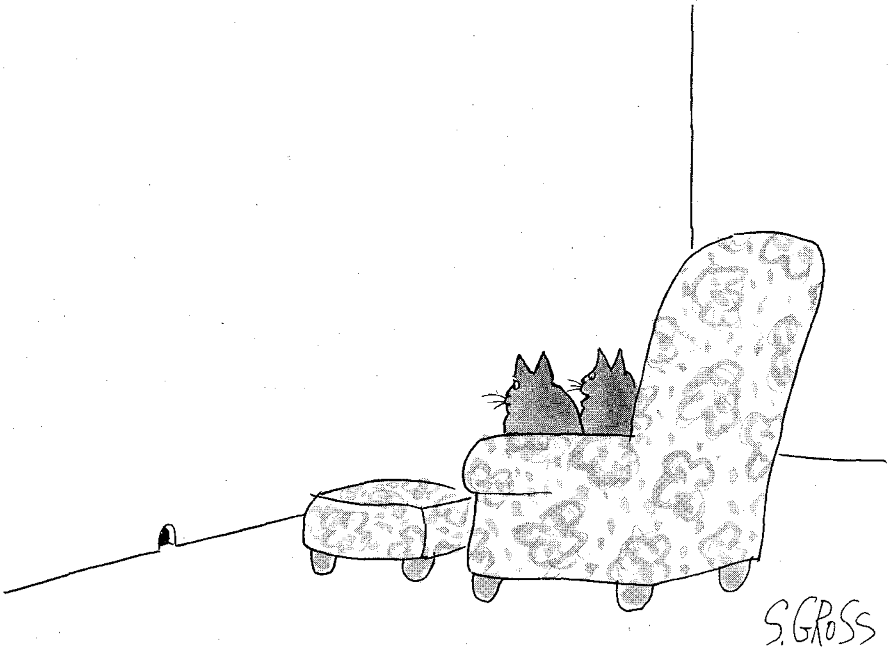
At eight, she thanked the Neals and departed. Not quite an hour later, ten blocks away—near the corner of Morgan and Lincoln Streets, a block shy of her destination—she collapsed on the sidewalk. A teen-age boy who lived across the street discovered her and ran into a nearby restaurant to call the police. She was alive when they arrived but dead shortly after an ambulance delivered her to the Morgan County Hospital. Only then was her brown wool jacket removed, and her barely bloodstained white turtleneck sweater, revealing a single stab wound on the left side of her chest. The next day, Paul Davis broke his vow and returned to Martinsville, where he paid a visit to the office of the Morgan County anything was going to happen it would have to be an anonymous tip. After a while, the thing just petered out."

Well, not exactly. Six weeks after the murder—by which time there had been an accumulation of news stories bearing headlines like "NO PROMISING LEADS IN MURDER PROBE" and "CLUES, MOTIVES SCARCE IN MARTINSVILLE SLAYING" and "POLICE PUT 'LID' ON FATAL STABBING CASE"—the Indianapolis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sent a telegram to the Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, requesting an investigation by the Department of Justice. The telegram stated that "Morgan County has historically been associated with Ku Klux Klan-like activities." This was, of course, technically true. And, indeed, the previous year—in the summer of 1967—a Klan motorcade had made a newsworthy tour of several central-Indiana towns which culminated in Martinsville. There, on the courthouse square, thirty or so robed Klansmen carried placards and distributed literature. The Indianapolis *Star* reported that the group's spokesman "said Martinsville was chosen for a demonstration because there is a strong local chapter in Morgan County." (Which is not to say that any of the Klansmen actually lived in Martinsville or that anyone from Martinsville had joined the motorcade.) Whether this episode had any connection to the murder was as much a matter of conjecture as most of the other elements of the case. The federal government never undertook a formal investigation, but the N.A.A.C.P. request helped plant in the minds of people—especially black people—in Indiana and beyond the belief that the Jenkins murder was racially motivated and that no one should be surprised that it had taken place where it did.

The first anniversary of the crime was the occasion for feature stories of the "Anybody Know Carol's Killer?" variety. After that, more than three decades went by with virtually no substantial media coverage. Still, the crime had lodged in the collective memory of people who could never quite stop speculating about it. The prime suspect, a construction worker whose whereabouts on the night of the murder were unknown, left the state not long afterward and, it was said, later died in a shootout in Illinois. Another suspect had been the owner of the auto-repair shop near where Carol's notebook was found, a circumstance that gave rise to a widely held screwdriver-as-murder-weapon theory. Both men were among several to whom the police administered polygraphs, and all "passed" (which, given the fallibility of polygraphs, proved and disproved nothing). Talking among themselves, Martinsville residents named names; often, these conversations took place after a few drinks. Beyond Martinsville, the scuttlebutt was that the police were unwilling or too inept to make the case—a point of view that, in time, the victim's family subscribed to.

What stray facts and factoids have surfaced across the years have tended to deepen rather than illuminate the mystery. After Paul and Elizabeth Davis divorced, she married a man named Gene Scott, and they adopted an infant named Phillip. In 1998, Phillip Scott, by then thirty years old, went to see his half sister Laura Davis Watkins—Paul's youngest child—and told her that, through friends, he had met people who knew who had killed Carol and how. "They took him to somebody's house in Martinsville," Laura told me. "They said everybody in Martinsville knows who killed her. He said he was amazed at how much these people knew. But, for whatever reason, Phillip wouldn't tell us any more than that." Actually, Phillip did convey one other piece of information: the murder weapon could be found in an underground gasoline tank at the site of the long-defunct auto-repair shop. Laura's brother Robert contacted the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and soon Paul Davis heard from a Martinsville police detective. When, a few months later, the gas tank was unearthed, a chisel was found inside, but it didn't match the dimensions of the fatal wound.

Two years later, the family received another provocative tip, from a woman who refused to give her name. She had been six years old at the time of the murder, she said, but she knew what had happened because she had heard about it from her father. The scenario she described involved more than one guilty party, as well as a screwdriver. When Paul asked for her name and phone number, she said, "I'm sorry. I have a family. I fear for my life." She never called back. Again, one of Paul's sons got in touch with the F.B.I., and again a Martinsville detective followed up. By then—the summer of 2000—Paul had long since become disaffected with both the Martinsville police and the state police, who, he felt, had for years arbitrarily withheld information from him. He hired his own private detective, a former state trooper named William McAllister. It took McAllister "about five minutes," he told me recently, to ascertain that the



"Now, isn't this more fun than spending money on dinner and a movie?"

prime suspect, the construction worker, had not died in Illinois but was alive and living in Florida.

Coincidentally, as McAllister was getting to work, the Indiana State Police were mobilizing a new investigative unit devoted to old homicides, and two detectives were assigned full time to the Jenkins case. That fall, Paul Davis, accompanied by an attorney and some other family members, made one more trip to Martinsville, for a meeting with the new team. Eventually, Paul became persuaded of the detectives' sincerity, and he authorized McAllister to share his files with them. This past summer, when they had been working on the case for more than a year, the Morgan County prosecutor decided to publicize the reopening of the investigation. When I asked the prosecutor, Steve Sonnega, for a prognosis, he said, "I think we're making progress. I'm not willing to say how much, because I really don't know. I think people think that if this case is going to be solved, now is the best time." In fact, the best time would have been in the fall of 1968, when the physical evidence was fresh, potential witnesses were available, and memories were less impeachable. The suspect in Florida, after initially refusing to coöperate, has reportedly become more talkative, but only in the interest of exculpating himself. Shy of an outright confession, any defendant convicted at this point would have to be approximately as unlucky as Carol Jenkins.

Paul Davis seems far less interested in the formality of a trial than he does in finding some peace. "Once they figure out who committed the crime, I don't know what they'd do about it," he said. "But, once I find out, then that will bring the family and me closure. We just want to know who done it and why.

"I pray every night that something comes, maybe some new DNA test. Because, if they don't get some new concrete evidence, the guy is still going to be walking around free, in Martinsville or wherever he is. But even solving the murder can't solve Martinsville's problem. It'll just help to take a little of the pressure off them that's been on them for so many years. To solve their problem, they're gonna have to diversify. They're gonna have to make it where black people can come in there living, working, and not having fear."

Four years ago, Martinsville attracted a lot of national publicity—once again, none of it desirable—in the wake of a high-school basketball game. A team with several black players came to town from Bloomington, and afterward its fans complained that they had been subjected to racial taunting and to dirty play on the court. (One black Bloomington player wound up on the floor retching after being violently elbowed.) The subsequent punishment levied by the Indiana High School Athletic Association—a one-year probation, which, among other things, forbade all Martinsville interscholastic teams to host conference home games—still provokes lamentations in Martinsville about unfairness and humiliation. (Not to mention that the out-of-town coverage inevitably dragged in references to the Klan and the Carol Jenkins murder—Q.E.D.)

A flap with an identical resonance occurred in late October, after the assistant police chief of Martinsville, Dennis Nail, who was unhappy with television news coverage of errant American bombs falling on civilians in Afghanistan, wrote a letter to the Martinsville *Reporter-Times* in which he railed against the networks for being sympathetic to the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and liberal pieties. The letter wasn't racist per se, but it didn't brim with good will toward one's fellow-man. Among other complaints, Nail bemoaned the outlawing of organized school prayer "because it might upset Hadji Hindu or Buddy Buddha," and he followed that up with a homophobic rant: "Our country was founded on Christian principles. Talk about majority. When I look around I see no Mosque, or fat, bald guys with bowls in their laps. I see churches. I'm offended when I turn on a television show and without fail a queer is in the plot just like it's a natural thing. America put God in the closet and let the queers out. When the planes struck the twin towers I never heard anyone utter, 'Oh, Ellen.' I heard a lot of, 'Oh, my God.' . . . It's time the dog started wagging the tail. Let's not be led around by a minority of weirdos and feel gooders. I, for one, am tired of it." The mayor of Martinsville and the police chief said that, while Nail's remarks might be offensive to some, he had made them as a private citizen, not as a public official, and therefore wouldn't be disciplined. During a meeting of the city council nine days after the letter was published, only one of the citizens present criticized Nail, who was in attendance and received a standing ovation.

One of Nail's most outspoken critics was Joanne Raetz Stuttgen, the folklorist. I asked her whether she could imagine a scenario in which Martinsville might rehabilitate its image. "Legends die hard, if they ever die at all," she said. "Facts don't matter much. If people believe a legend, that's enough. If Martinsville could be magically proved to be the most gracious, charitable, humanitarian, loving Christian community on earth, there would still be people that would continue to believe that it's not. Belief will always be stronger than the truth."

The party line in Martinsville, among civic leaders and people in law enforcement, is that the Jenkins murder was motivated not by race but by sex. According to this rationale, Carol Jenkins died because she spurned her killer's advances. This is, of course, a wishful hypothesis. (How could anyone but the killer know?) Nevertheless, the impulse is understandable. In the aftermath of the Dennis Nail outburst, more than seven hundred Martinsville residents signed a full-page newspaper ad that said, "We respect and affirm the dignity of all people," but it's unlikely that any of them imagined this gesture encouraging African-Americans to move there. By now, the people of Martinsville are possessed of few illusions about the rest of the world's opinions. It might be that places like Martinsville end up performing a perverse public service for those of us who live in racially diverse communities: they make us more than a little smug and spare us the trouble of examining our own bigotries. In a town burdened with Martinsville's history, an ugly basketball game, a public official having a very bad day—incidents that anywhere else might seem like peccadilloes—easily become caricatures of evil. Martinsville is a familiar landscape, but one less sunny than the one that most of us inhabit. And Carol Jenkins, who was only passing through, has taken up permanent residence there—a moment, a memory, a stigma, as fixed as the rhythm of her telltale heart. ♦

ADVERTISEMENT

ON THE town

Our advertisers invite you to mark your calendars for some of the best events and promotions coming to your town in the months ahead.

ROLEX

ROLEX SETS SAIL IN ANNAPOLIS

Rolex Watch U.S.A. honored participants during the Rolex International Women's Keelboat Championship at an exclusive cocktail reception. Co-hosted by Rolex, *The New Yorker* and other select Condé Nast magazines, the event was held on September 26th in Annapolis, Maryland. Title sponsor of the regatta since its inception in 1985, Rolex continues to be a committed supporter of women's athletics.

Regatta Co-Chair Anne Harrington and Bill Sandberg, Rolex Watch U.S.A. Corporate Advertising Manager, enjoy wine from Dry Creek Vineyard.

The winning team

For more information, log on to www.newyorker.com and click on The New Yorker Reader Link.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

THEATRE-LOBBY NOTICES

BY ANDY BOROWITZ

WARNING: In Act II, there is gunfire, an explosion, and a lengthy monologue by a character named Mr. God.

WARNING: Owing to a typographical error, the *Times* review of this play omitted the word "horrible."

WARNING: When the curtain rises, you may be startled by the sight of a former movie star's ravaged face.

WARNING: In Act III, there is full frontal nudity, but not involving the actor you would like to see naked.

WARNING: During this afternoon's performance, there will be a chatty women's group from Great Neck seated directly behind you.

WARNING: People who do not find plays about incurable bone diseases entertaining should probably go home right now.

WARNING: The lead actor in tonight's play is a veteran of the Royal Shakespeare Company who always showers the first five rows with spittle.

WARNING: In interviews, the composer of tonight's long-delayed musical has referred to it as both "a pet project" and "a labor of love."

WARNING: Any audience members you may hear laughing this evening have been paid handsomely to do so.

WARNING: Tonight's play is being produced despite explicit instructions in the dead playwright's will to "burn all remaining copies to a crisp."

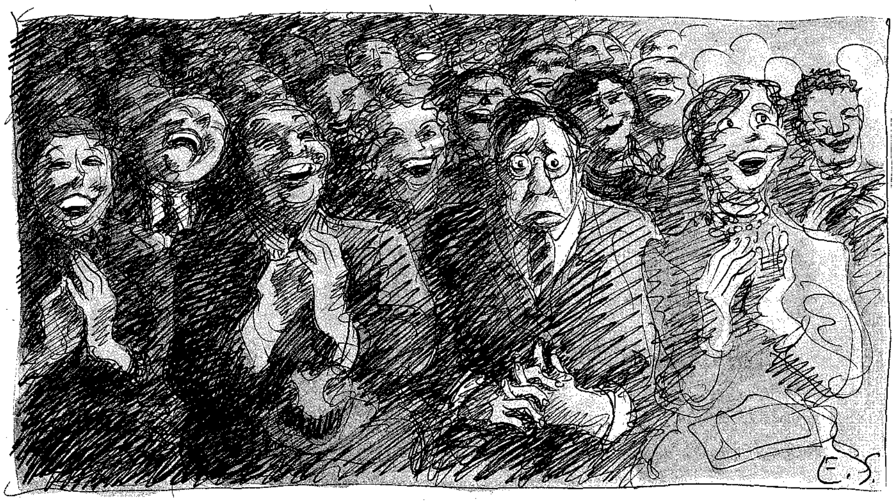
WARNING: The role usually played by Sir Ian McKellen will be performed tonight by the actor who played Isaac on "The Love Boat."

WARNING: This play has a title that is very similar to that of another play currently running on Broadway, which is the one you meant to buy tickets for.

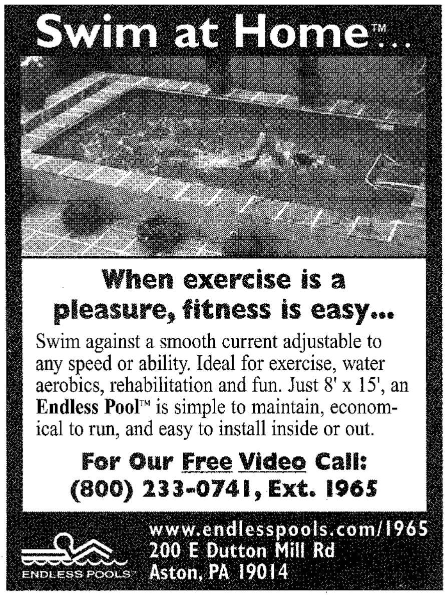
WARNING: In order to enjoy this play, it is necessary to have some knowledge of Basque dialects.

WARNING: Tom Stoppard found the play you are about to see "confusing."

WARNING: Tonight's play is performed without an intermission and you will be stuck here forever. ♦



EDWARD SOREL



Swim at Home™...

When exercise is a pleasure, fitness is easy...

Swim against a smooth current adjustable to any speed or ability. Ideal for exercise, water aerobics, rehabilitation and fun. Just 8' x 15', an **Endless Pool**™ is simple to maintain, economical to run, and easy to install inside or out.

For Our Free Video Call:
(800) 233-0741, Ext. 1965

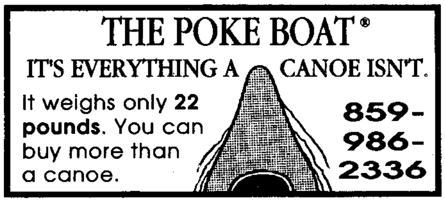
ENDLESS POOLS
www.endlesspools.com/1965
200 E Dutton Mill Rd
Aston, PA 19014

WHY JUST **SEE ITALY** WHEN YOU CAN **SAVOR IT**?

SMALL GROUP AND CUSTOM TOURS FOR THE PASSIONATE TRAVELER

CARAVELLA ITALIA

WWW.**SEEITALY**.COM
888.665.2112



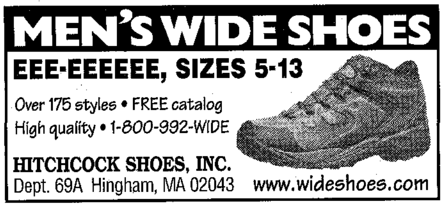
THE POKE BOAT®
IT'S EVERYTHING A CANOE ISN'T.

It weighs only **22 pounds**. You can buy more than a canoe.

859-986-2336

Tired of Burned Beans?
try
Vienna's Favorite
Gourmet Coffee
Julius Meinl Coffee ... medium roasted for the Peak of Flavor!
U.S. Customers Receive 20% OFF!!
Visit Our Website: www.meinl.com

Listed Among Forbes' "Best of the Web"...
Superior and Luxury Villas and Apartments
PROVENCE • COTE D'AZUR • PARIS
Rentals & Sales
JUST*France* 610-407-9633 Fax 610-407-0213
www.justfrance.com



MEN'S WIDE SHOES
EEE-EEEEEE, SIZES 5-13
Over 175 styles • FREE catalog
High quality • 1-800-992-WIDE
HITCHCOCK SHOES, INC.
Dept. 69A Hingham, MA 02043 www.wideshoes.com

ANNALS OF SCIENCE

ICE MEMORY

Does a glacier hold the secret of how civilization began—and how it may end?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

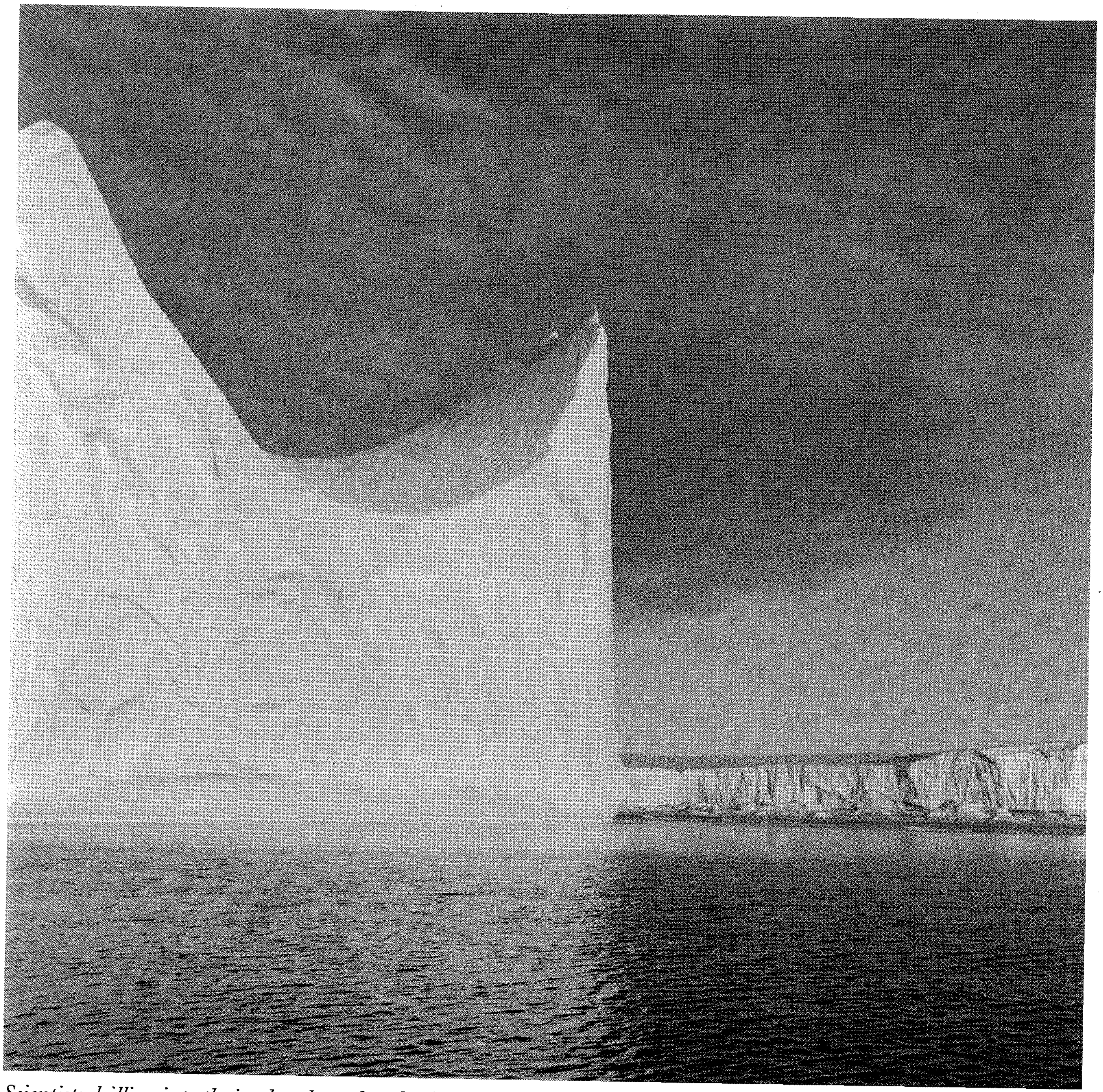
Ice, like water, flows, and so the North Greenland Ice-core Project, or North GRIP, lies in the center of the island, along a line known as the ice divide. This is a desolate spot eight degrees north of the Arctic Circle, but, thanks to the New York Air National Guard, not actually all that difficult to reach. The research station is open from mid-May to mid-August, and every season the Guard provides some half-dozen flights to it, using specially ski-equipped LC-130s. The planes, also outfitted with small rockets, can land directly on the ice, which stretches for hundreds of miles in every direction. (To the extent that there is a military justification for the flights, it is to keep pilots in practice; however, the main purpose of practicing seems to be to make the flights—an arrangement whose logic I could never quite fathom.) This past June, I flew up to North GRIP on a plane that was carrying several thousand feet of drilling cable, a group of glaciologists, and Denmark's then minister of research, a stout, red-haired woman named Birthe Weiss. Like the rest of us, the Minister had to sit in the hold, wearing military-issue earplugs.

One of the station's field directors, J. P. Steffensen, greeted us when we disembarked. We were dressed in huge insulated boots and heavy snow gear. Steffensen had on a pair of old sneakers, a filthy parka that was flapping open, and no gloves. Tiny icicles hung from his beard. First, he delivered a short lecture on the dangers of dehydration: "It sounds like a complete contradiction in terms—you're standing on three thousand metres of water but it's extremely dry, so make sure that you have to go and pee." Then he briefed us on camp protocol. North GRIP has two computerized toilets, from Sweden, but men were kindly requested to relieve themselves out on the ice, at a spot designated by a little red flag.

Steffensen, a Dane, runs North GRIP along with his wife, Dorthe Dahl-Jensen, whom he met on an earlier Greenland expedition. Together with a few dozen fellow-scientists—mostly Danes, but also Icelanders, Swedes, Germans, and Swiss, among others—they have spent the past six summers drilling a five-inch-wide hole from the top of the ice sheet down to the bedrock, ten thousand feet below. Their reason for wanting to do this is an interest in ancient climates. My reason for wanting to watch is perhaps best described as an interest—partly lurid, but also partly pragmatic—in apocalypse.

Over the past decade or so, there has been a shift—inevitably labelled a "paradigm shift"—in the way scientists regard the Earth's climate. The new view goes under the catchphrase "abrupt climate change," although it might more evocatively be called neo-catastrophism, after the old, Biblically inspired theories of flood and disaster. Behind it lies no particular theoretical insight—scientists have, in fact, been hard-pressed to come up with a theory to make sense of it—but it is supported by overwhelming empirical evidence, much of it gathered in Greenland. The Greenland ice cores have shown that it is a mistake to regard our own, relatively benign experience of the climate as the norm. By now, the adherents of neo-catastrophism include virtually every climatologist of any standing.

Abrupt climate changes occurred long before there was human technology, and therefore have nothing directly to do with what we refer to as global warming. Yet the discovery that for most of the past hundred thousand years the Earth's climate has been in flux, changing not gradually, or even incrementally, but violently and without warning, can't help but cast the global-warming debate in new terms. It is still possible to imagine that the Earth will slowly heat up, and that the landscape and the weather will gradually evolve in response. But it is also possible that the



Scientists drilling into the ice sheet have found evidence of abrupt, cataclysmic climate changes. Photograph by Lynn Davis.

ICEBERG #31/COURTESY EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

change will come, as it has in the past, in the form of something much worse.

Greenland, the world's largest island, is nearly four times the size of France—eight hundred and forty thousand square miles—and except for its southern tip lies above the Arctic Circle. The first Europeans to make a stab at settling it were the Norse, under the leadership of Erik the Red, who, perhaps deliberately, gave the island its misleading name. In the year 985, he arrived with twenty-five ships and nearly seven hundred followers. (Erik had left Norway when his father was exiled for killing a man, and then was himself exiled from Iceland for killing several more.) The Norse established two settlements, the Eastern Settlement, which was actually in the south, and the Western Settlement, which was to the north of that. For roughly four hundred years, they managed to scrape by, hunting, raising livestock, and making occasional logging expeditions to the coast of Canada. But then something went wrong. The last written record of them is an Icelandic affidavit regarding the marriage of Thorstein Ólafsson and Sigrídur Björnsdóttir, which took place in the Eastern Settlement on the "Second Sunday after the Mass of the Cross" in the autumn of 1408.

These days, the island has fifty-six thousand inhabitants, most of them Inuit, and almost a quarter live in the capital, Nuuk, about four hundred miles up the western coast. Since the late nineteen-seventies, Greenland has enjoyed a measure of home rule, but the Danes, who consider the island a province, still spend the equivalent of three hundred and forty million dollars a year to support it. The result is a thin and not entirely convincing First World veneer. Greenland has almost no agriculture or industry or, for that matter, roads. Following Inuit tradition, private ownership of land is not allowed, although it is possible to buy a house, an expensive proposition in a place where even the sewage pipes have to be insulated.

More than eighty per cent of Greenland is covered by ice. Locked into this enormous glacier is eight per cent of the Earth's freshwater supply: enough, were it to melt, to raise sea levels around the world by more than twenty feet. Except for researchers in the summer, no one lives on the ice, or even ventures out onto it very often. (The edges are riddled with crevasses large enough to swallow a dog sled, or, should the occasion arise, a five-ton truck.)

Like all glaciers, the Greenland ice sheet is made up entirely of accumulated snow. The most recent layers are thick and airy, while the older layers are thin and dense, which means that to drill down through the ice is to descend backward in time, at first gradually and then much more rapidly. A hundred and thirty-eight feet down, there is snow dating from the American Civil War; some twenty-five hundred feet down, snow from the days of Plato; and, five thousand three hundred and fifty feet down, from the time when prehistoric painters were decorating the caves of Lascaux. At the very bottom, there is snow that fell on Greenland before the last ice age, which began more than a hundred thousand years ago.

As the snow is compressed, its crystal structure changes to ice. (Two thousand feet down, there is so much pressure on the ice that a sample drawn to the surface will, if mishandled, fracture, and in some cases even explode.) But in most other respects the snow remains unchanged, a relic of the climate that first formed it. In the Greenland ice there is volcanic ash from Krakatau, lead pollution from ancient Roman smelters, and dust blown in from Mongolia on ice-age winds. Every layer also contains tiny bubbles of trapped air, each of them a sample of a past atmosphere.

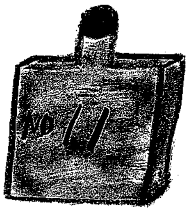
All across the Earth, there are, of course, traces of climate history—buried in lake sediments, deposited in ancient beetle casings, piled up on the floor of the oceans. The distinguishing feature of the Greenland ice, and what separates it from other ice, including ice extracted from the Antarctic, is its extraordinary resolution.

Even in summer, when the sun never sets, the snow doesn't melt in central Greenland, though during a clear day some of the top layer will evaporate. Then at night—or what passes for night—this moisture will refreeze. The immediate effect is lovely to behold: one morning, I was wandering around North GRIP at about five o'clock, and I saw the hoarfrost growing in lacy patterns underfoot. As the summer snow gets buried under winter snow, it maintains its distinctive appearance; in a snow pit, summer layers show up as both coarser and airier than winter ones. It turns out that even after thousands of years the difference between summer snow and winter snow can be distinguished. Thus, simply by counting backward it is possible to date each layer of ice and also the climatological information embedded in it.

The North Greenland Ice-core Project consists of six cherry-red tents arrayed around a black geodesic dome that was purchased, mail order, from Minnesota. In front of the dome, someone has planted the standard jokey symbol of isolation, a milepost that shows Kangerlussuaq, the nearest town, to be nine hundred kilometres away. Nearby stands the standard jokey symbol of the cold, a plywood palm tree. The view on all sides is exactly the same: an utterly flat stretch of white which could be described as sublime or, alternatively, as merely bleak.

Beneath the camp, an eighty-foot-long tunnel leads down to what is known as the drilling room. This chamber has been hollowed out of the ice, and inside the temperature never rises above fourteen degrees. A few years ago, foot-thick pine beams were added to reinforce the ceiling, but the weight of the snow piling up on top has grown so great that the beams have splintered. Because of the way the ice moves, the chamber, which is lit by overhead lights and filled with electronic equipment, is not just being buried but is also slowly shrinking and at the same time sinking.

Drilling begins at North GRIP every morning at eight. The first task of the day is to lower the drill, a twelve-foot-long tube with big metal teeth on one end, down to the bottom of the borehole. Once in position, the drill can be set spinning so that an ice cylinder gradually forms within it. This, in turn, can be pulled up to the surface by means of a steel cable.



The first time I went down to watch the process, a glaciologist from Iceland and another from Germany were manning the controls. At the depth they had reached—nine thousand six hundred and eighty feet—it took an hour for the drill just to descend. During that period, there was not much for the two men to do except monitor the computer, which sat on a little heating pad, and listen to Abba. The ice near the bottom of the hole was warmer than expected, and it had been breaking badly. "The word 'stuck' is not in our vocabulary," the Icelander, Thorsteinn Thorsteinsson, told me, with a nervous giggle. Eventually, the drillers managed to pull out a short piece of core—about two feet—to show Birthe Weiss, who arrived in the chamber wearing a red snowsuit. To me, it looked a lot like a two-foot-long cylinder of ordinary ice, except that it was heavily scored around the edges. It was made up of snow that had fallen a hundred and five thousand years ago, Thorsteinsson said. Weiss exclaimed something in Danish and seemed suitably impressed.

After a piece of core comes up, it is packed in a plastic tube, put in an insulated crate, and shipped out on the next LC-130 to Kangerlussuaq. From there, it is flown to Denmark, where it is stored in a refrigerated vault at the University of Copenhagen, to be cut up later for analysis. Inevitably, more researchers want a piece of the core than there are pieces to give out. A small library of papers has been written on the various gases and dust particles and radioactive by-products that have been trapped in the ice. These papers have shown that the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has fluctuated over time, and that these fluctuations have occurred roughly in tandem with changes in the climate. But the crucial insight has to do with the ice itself.

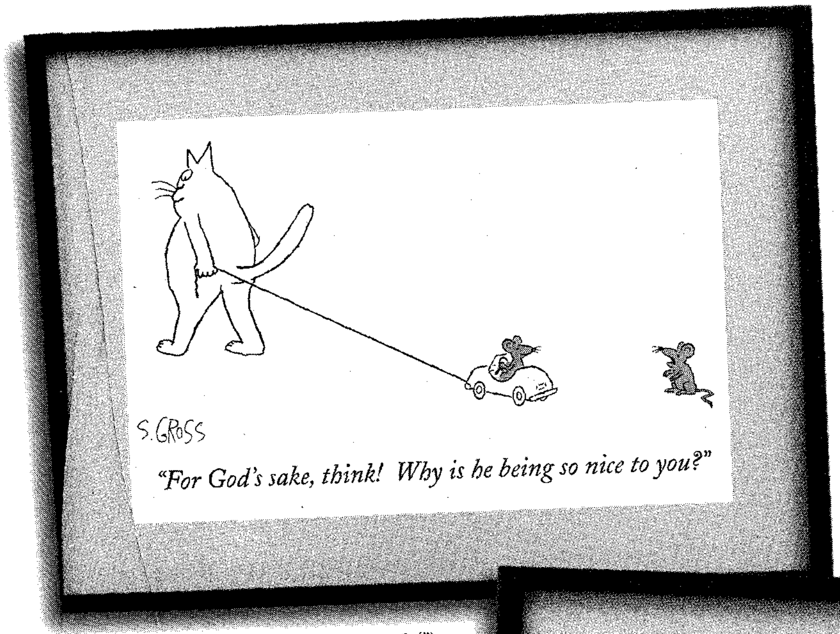
Water occurs naturally in several isotopic forms, depending on the hydrogen and oxygen atoms that joined together to make it. Typically, hydrogen has one proton and an atomic weight of 1, but when its nucleus also contains a neutron and it has an atomic weight of 2, it produces heavy water, which is used in nuclear reactors. Oxygen generally has eight neutrons and an atomic weight of 16, but it also comes in another stable version, with

ADVERTISEMENT

THE NEW YORKER CARTOONS & COVERS AVAILABLE AT THE CARTOON BANK

The Cartoon Bank is your only source for framed and matted New Yorker cartoon prints. We have the largest, most comprehensive collection of published New Yorker cartoons in the world. And now we offer selected New Yorker covers, too.

Order online at **cartoonbank.com** or by phone at 1-800-897-TOON (8666). And if you don't see the cartoon or cover you want online, let us search our in-house archive. Our specialists are always eager to help.


S.GROSS
"For God's sake, think! Why is he being so nice to you?"

Sam Gross 1998 (ACTUAL SIZE 11" x 14")

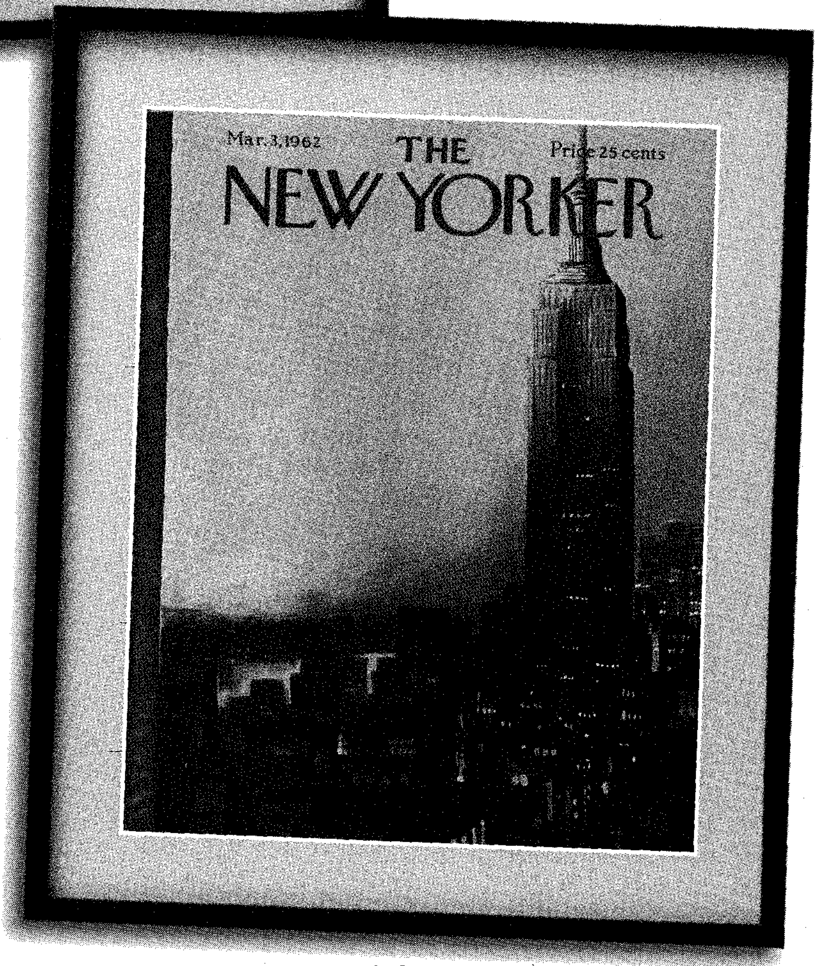
CARTOON PRINTS

Stop snipping cartoons from the magazine. Buy a framed or matted print. Classic black wood frame with off-white rag mat, $195. Matted only, $125. Plus shipping & handling.

NEW VINTAGE COVER COLLECTION

Cover connoisseurs, rejoice! Beautiful color New Yorker cover prints now available. Featuring selected artists from 1925 to 1992. Black frame with mat, $350. Matted only, $250. Plus shipping & handling.

Can't decide which cartoon print or cover to send? Send a Cartoon Bank gift certificate instead. It's the perfect gift for any occasion.



Arthur Getz 1962 (ACTUAL SIZE 23" x 29")

CARTOONBANK.COM
A New Yorker Magazine Company

145 PALISADE STREET, SUITE 373 • DOBBS FERRY, NY 10522 • 1-800-897-TOON • toon@cartoonbank.com

© 2001 THE CARTOON BANK. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

two extra neutrons and an atomic weight of 18. In any given water sample, the lighter ^{16}O atoms will vastly outnumber the heavier ^{18}O atoms, but by how much, exactly, is variable. In the early nineteen-sixties, Willi Dansgaard, a Danish chemist, proved that the ratio between the two in rainwater was related to the temperature. Dansgaard took samples of rain from around the world and demonstrated that, by running them through a mass spectrometer, he could in most cases arrive at the average temperature of the spot where they had fallen. Subsequently, he showed that this same technique could be applied to ice and, in particular, to the Greenland ice sheet.

Going back over the past ten thousand years, the Greenland ^{18}O record shows lots of bumps and squiggles. There is, for example, a slight but perceptible increase in temperature in the early years of the Middle Ages, which leads to what has become known as the Medieval Warm Period, when the English planted vineyards and the Norse established their Greenland settlements. And there's a dip some six or seven hundred years later, corresponding to the Little Ice Age, which killed off the vineyards and, most likely, led to the demise of the Greenland Norse. But the variation is limited. Between the Medieval Warm Period and the Little Ice Age, Greenland's average temperature fell by only a few degrees. Its average temperature today, meanwhile, is not very different from what it was ten millennia ago, when our ancestors stopped doing whatever it was that they had been doing and learned to plant crops.

It's hard to look much farther back in the record, however, without feeling a little queasy. About twenty thousand years ago, the Earth was still in the grip of the last ice age. During this period, called the Wisconsin by American scientists, ice sheets covered nearly a third of the world's landmass, reaching as far south as New York City.

The transition out of the Wisconsin is preserved in great detail in the Greenland ice. What the record shows is that it was a period of intense instability. The temperature did not rise slowly, or even steadily; instead, the climate flipped several times from temperate conditions back into those of an ice age, and then back again. Around fifteen thousand years ago, Greenland abruptly warmed by sixteen degrees in fifty years or less. In one particularly traumatic episode some twelve thousand years ago, the mean temperature in Greenland shot up by fifteen degrees in a single decade.

If we go back farther still, the picture is no more comforting. Even as much of Europe and North America lay buried under glaciers, the temperature in Greenland was oscillating wildly, sometimes in spikes of ten degrees, sometimes in spikes of twenty. In an effort to convey the erratic nature of these changes, Richard Alley, a geophysicist who is leading a National Academy of Sciences panel on abrupt climate change, has compared the climate to a light switch being toyed with by an impish three-year-old. (The panel recently issued a report warning of the possibility of "large, abrupt, and unwelcome" climate changes.) He has also likened it to a freakish carnival ride. "Dozens of rapid changes litter the record of the last hundred thousand years," he observed. "If you can possibly imagine the spectacle of some really stupid person (or, better, a mannequin) bungee jumping off the side of a moving roller-coaster car, you can begin to picture the climate."

The first Greenland ice core was drilled in the mid-nineteen-sixties, at a U.S. military installation called Camp Century. The goal was not to challenge established views of the Earth's climate. Rather, the core was an instance of what Thomas Kuhn, in his famous essay "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," called "normal science"—although it would perhaps be unfair to label anything associated with Camp Century as normal.

Built in 1959 in the northwestern corner of Greenland, the camp was a semi-secret research station for a very cold war. It featured a tunnel eleven hundred feet long and twenty-six feet wide, called Main Street, which led to dormitories, a ten-bed hospital, a mess hall, a skating rink, and a store that sold perfume to send back home—all under the ice. (A favorite camp joke was that there was a girl behind every tree.) Powering the enterprise was a portable nuclear reactor. "In an era in which it has become fashionable to describe the democratic countries as soft or lazy, the fantastic ice city is a wholesome answer to such nonsensical clichés," one particularly patriotic visitor reported. (The camp, which closed after a decade in operation, has since been obliterated by the movement of the ice.)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led the camp's ice-coring effort. The Americans managed to drill their way right down to the bottom of the ice sheet, but when they were finished they didn't quite know what to do with the core they had produced. It fell to Chester Langway, a glaciologist who was working for the Corps's Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory, to figure something out. Langway is now semi-retired and operates a small antique store on Cape Cod. He recalled travelling all around the country, attempting to drum up interest. "Some people looked at it and they said, 'That's just ice,' which it's not," he told me. Eventually, he and Dansgaard got in touch, and together the two men made the first study of the core.

At the time, one of the central questions in climate research was how ice ages began and how they ended. One theory, first worked out in detail in the nineteen-twenties by a Serbian astrophysicist named Milutin Milankovitch, was that glaciers advance and retreat in response to slight, periodic changes in the Earth's orbit. These changes alter the distribution of sunlight at various latitudes during various seasons, and Milankovitch predicted that the strongest effects would be observed at intervals of nineteen thousand, twenty-three thousand, forty-one thousand, and a hundred thousand years.

Dansgaard and Langway's study of the Camp Century core confirmed these so-called Milankovitch cycles but also gave evidence of the climate's carnival-ride-like reversals. This evidence was dismissed by many as an idiosyncrasy of the polar ice. Sigfus Johnsen was a student of Dansgaard's who worked with him on the Camp Century core, and he happened to be travelling to North GRIP at the same time I was. Johnsen is now sixty-one, with wispy white hair and pale-blue eyes, and looks like a slightly dissolute Santa. He told me that the scientists working on the Camp Century core weren't sure themselves what to make of what they had found. "It was too incredible, something we didn't expect at all," he said.

It took fifteen years for anyone to drill another Greenland core. Largely because of Dansgaard and Langway's friendship, this second core was a European-American collaboration. It was drilled at an American radar base, Dye 3, a spot chosen for budgetary rather than scientific reasons, and from the outset everyone involved in the project knew that the location was a problem. Dye 3 was so close to the coast that the oldest layers of ice had mostly flowed out to sea. Nevertheless, the core confirmed all the most significant Camp Century results, demonstrating that findings which had seemed anomalous were at least reproducible. When the Dye 3 results were published, in the early nineteen-eighties, they set off what is perhaps best described as an ice rush, and the spirit of international coöperation quickly broke down. The Europeans decided to drill a new core where the ice is most stable, along the ice divide, and the Americans decided to do the same thing some twenty miles away.

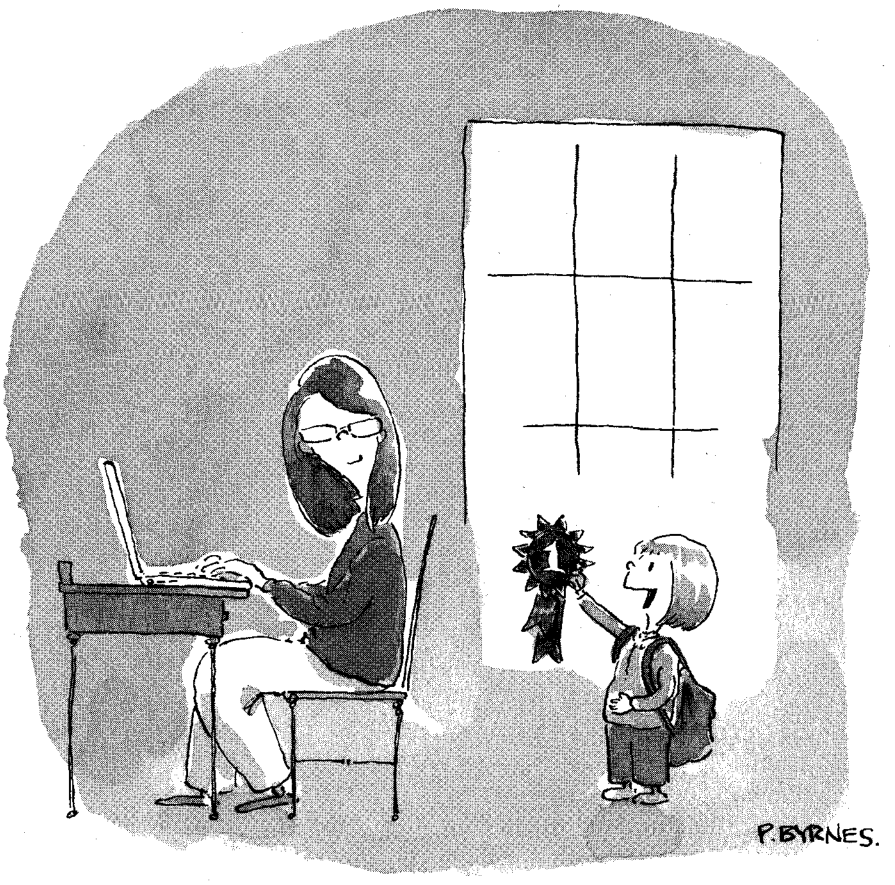
Theorists are still struggling to catch up with the data from those two cores, the first of which was completed in 1992 and the second a year later. No known external force, or even any that has been hypothesized, seems capable of yanking the temperature back and forth as violently, and as often, as these cores have shown to be the case. Somehow, the climate system—through some vast and terrible feedback loop—must, it is now assumed, be capable of generating its own instabilities. The most popular hypothesis is that the oceans are responsible. Currents like the Gulf Stream transfer heat in huge quantities from the tropics toward the poles, and if this circulation pattern could somehow be shut off—by, say, a sudden influx of freshwater—it would have a swift and dramatic impact. Computer modellers have tried to reproduce such a shutdown, with some success. But once the ocean circulation comes to a halt, modellers have had a hard time getting it to start up again. "We are in a state now where the more we know, the more it becomes clear how little we really understand about the system," the oceanographer Jochem Marotzke told me.

For at least half a million years, and probably a lot longer, warm periods and ice ages have alternated according to a fairly regular, if punishing, pattern: ten thousand years of warmth, followed by ninety thousand years of cold. The current warm period, the Holocene, is now ten thousand years old, and, all things being equal—which is to say had we not interfered with the pattern by burning fossil fuels—we should now be heading toward another ice age.

As a continuous temperature record, the Greenland ice gives out at about a hundred and fifteen thousand years ago, at a moment in the climate cycle roughly analogous to our own—the end of the last interglacial period, which the Europeans call the Eemian and the Americans the Sangamon. What this part of the record suggests is disputed. The European core seemed to indicate that the period ended with a cataclysm even worse than the wild temperature swings that occurred at the end of the Wisconsin. During this cold snap, temperatures appear to have plunged from warmer than they are today to the coldest levels of the ice age, all within a matter of a few decades, and then to have climbed back up again, equally dramatically, a century or so later. The Europeans euphemistically dubbed this instant Eemian ice age Event One.

The Americans, however, determined that at the bottom of their core the ice had folded in on itself as it flowed, making accurate interpretation impossible. The two groups got together for a conference in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, in 1995, and agreed on virtually everything except for Event One. Steffensen, North GRIP's field leader, recalls that the Europeans, who had rushed to publish their results, were crestfallen to have them discredited. He remembers going down to the hotel bar in Wolfeboro with some colleagues and thinking, The Eemian is dead; we have to bury it. Then, he told me, "we had a few drinks, and it came back to life."

The driving purpose behind North GRIP is to drill a core that will finally provide a clean record of the last interglacial period and validate Event One. Doing so would obviously be significant for several reasons: retrospectively, it would show temperature instabilities in yet another part of the climate cycle, and prospectively it would seem to suggest a cataclysm in our own not too distant future. "In the first place, if we find this it will scare the hell out of us," Sigfus Johnsen told me. But getting back to the Eemian remains a daunting technical challenge. In the summer of 1997, after the drillers at North GRIP had reached nearly a mile deep, the drill got stuck and could not be retrieved. The next summer, they had to



"I won the spell-check bee."

start all over again. They were almost two miles down when, in July, 2000, the drill got stuck again. At that point, they poured antifreeze down the hole, and eventually managed to yank the drill back up, but by then the weather was turning, and they had to close the station for the season. When I arrived, last June, they had finally finished bailing out the antifreeze and resumed drilling. Still, things were not going well. Something—presumably geothermal heat from some previously undetected "hot spot"—was warming the ice from below, making drilling extremely difficult.

Everyone I met at North GRIP was quite open about saying he believed—and hoped—that Event One had indeed taken place. Apparently, the prospect of having spent six summers up on the ice with essentially nothing to show for it was more disturbing than any fate that might lie in store for the planet. I found myself feeling torn as well. On the one hand, Event One did not sound like much to look forward to. On the other, it did seem to offer a certain perverse consolation: global warming versus Event One—either way, things were bound to end badly. I proposed this idea to Steffensen. Unimpressed, he pointed out that, if you believed the climate to be inherently unstable, the last thing you'd want to do is conduct a vast unsupervised experiment on it, and he went on to explain that it would be wrong to think of global warming and Event One as alternatives. It is entirely possible, if apparently paradoxical, that global warming could produce a precipitous cooling, at least in Europe and parts of North America, by, say, shutting down the Gulf Stream. It is also possible that it could push the climate into an unstable mode, leading, especially in the upper latitudes, to a period of wild temperature swings of the sort that characterized the end of the last ice age. Finally, it is possible that we have changed the atmosphere so much—carbon-dioxide levels are approaching those of the age of the dinosaurs—that we will enter a new climate phase altogether. During the Cretaceous period, there were no major ice sheets, or ice ages, and much of the planet was covered with steamy swamps. To the extent that the historical record is any guide, the result of any climate change is unlikely to be a happy one. Steffensen recited to me an old Danish saying, whose pertinence I didn't entirely understand, but which nevertheless stuck with me. He translated it as "Pissing in your pants will only keep you warm for so long."

ELEGANCE

All that is uncared for.
Left alone in the stillness
in that pure silence married
to the stillness of nature.
A door off its hinges,
shade and shadows in an empty room.
Leaks for light. Raw where
the tin roof rusted through.
The rustle of weeds in their
different kinds of air in the mornings,
year after year.
A pecan tree, and the house
made out of mud bricks. Accurate
and unexpected beauty, rattling
and singing. If not to the sun,
then to nothing and to no one.

—*Linda Gregg*

Life at North GRIP, if not exactly comfortable, is at least well supplied. Lunch the day I arrived was a fish stew prepared in a delicate tomato base. In the midafternoon, there was coffee and cake; then, in the evening, cocktails, which were served in a chamber hollowed out of the snowpack, to relieve pressure on the drilling room. The German driller had provided a recipe for *Glühwein*, and everyone—scientists, graduate students, the Danish minister and her entourage, and the crew from the Air National Guard—was standing around in the dark, in cold-weather gear, drinking. ("Why do all the Danes I meet seem to come from Copenhagen?" I heard one of the pilots ask a young glaciologist.) For dinner, although I wasn't really hungry, I had a lamb chop in cream sauce, topped with diced leeks. At around midnight, the drillers finally emerged from under the ice. It was broad daylight outside, and inside the geodesic dome there was still a crowd drinking beer and smoking cigars.

As with so many recent discoveries about natural history, what seems, in the end, most surprising about the Greenland cores is exactly what might have seemed, at the outset, not to require any explanation at all. How is it that we happen to live in this, climatologically speaking, best of all possible times? On statistical grounds, it certainly seems improbable that the only period in the climate record as stable as our own *is* our own. And it seems, if anything, even more improbable that climatologists should make the discovery that we are living in this period of exceptional stability at the very moment when, by their own calculations, it is likely nearing an end.

But to approach the problem in this way is to fail to realize the extent to which we are ourselves a product of the climate record. Scientists were once puzzled by the evidence in lake sediments of the return of Arctic flowers to northern Europe at a time when the ice age had been over for more than a thousand years. Now those lake sediments seem to provide exemplary evidence of how the climate shifted and shifted again during that period. The reappearance of cold-loving beetles in the British Isles and the resurgence of tiny, cold-tolerant foraminifers in the North Atlantic can also be interpreted in these terms. And so, too, arguably, can the rise of human civilization and, by extension, the progress of climatology.

One night, I was sitting in the geodesic dome at North GRIP with Steffensen. He was coming to the end of a month on the ice, and had the weatherbeaten look of someone who has spent too long at sea. "If you look at the paleoclimatic output of ice cores, it has really changed the picture of the world, our view of past climates, and of human evolution," he said, while, next to us, a group of graduate students played board games and listened to the soundtrack from "Buena Vista Social Club." "Now you're able to put human evolution into a climatic framework. You can ask, Why did human beings not make civilization fifty thousand years ago? You know that they had just as big brains as we have today. When you put it in a climatic framework, you can say, Well, it was the ice age. And also this ice age was so climatically unstable that each time you had the beginning of a culture they had to move. Then comes the present interglacial—ten thousand years of very stable climate. The perfect conditions for agriculture. If you look at it, it's amazing. Civilizations in Persia, in China, and in India start at the same time, maybe six thousand years ago. They all developed writing and they all developed religion and they all built cities, all at the same time, because the climate was stable. I think that if the climate would have been stable fifty thousand years ago it would have started then. But they had no chance."

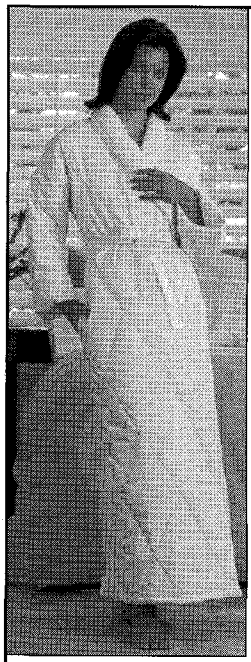
The only way into North GRIP is through Kangerlussuaq, and it is the only way out as well. The name means "very long fjord," and Kangerlussuaq does indeed lie at the end of a hundred-and-eighty-mile-long fjord, which opens out into the Davis Strait. The setting is spectacular—snow-covered mountains rising out of a glacial plain. The town itself, however, is mostly poured concrete and corrugated iron, the remains of a now defunct American Air Force base that was called Sonderstrom, or, for short, Sondy. The night I arrived, I was invited to dinner at the town's best restaurant, at the airport. I missed the hors d'oeuvres, which had included whale skin, but arrived in time for the entrée, which was reindeer. When I left, at about 9 P.M., I saw a musk ox on the hillside just beyond the terminal.

The edge of the ice sheet lies some ten miles away, and it can be seen—a ghostly white blur in the distance—by climbing just about any hill. After returning from North GRIP, I had a few days to spend in Kangerlussuaq, and one afternoon I hitched a ride out to the ice with some glaciologists who were also awaiting flights home. We took a dirt road that had been built by Volkswagen, and someone put Pink Floyd on the truck's CD player. Almost as soon as we got out of town, we were in the wild, cutting through fields of tiny purple Arctic rhododendron.

The Volkswagen road goes all the way up onto the ice sheet and ends a hundred miles later at a test track. (Rumor has it that there is also a three-star hotel and restaurant in a modular building that was trucked out to the site.) We stopped far short of that, at a fast-running river, brown with silt. The ice sheet rose up beyond it, like a wall, two hundred feet high. It was a startling shade of blue. One of the glaciologists explained that the color was an effect of the ice's peculiar density. Up at North GRIP, a set of poles that are slowly drifting apart mark the glacier's flow; at the edge of the ice, the same process produces more dramatic results. As we were talking, a huge section of the wall tore free and crashed into the river, sprinkling us with ice chips.

Although it was a clear blue day, a chill wind was blowing off the glacier, and, after we had all finished taking pictures, we climbed back into the truck. Soon we passed a small herd of reindeer that had come down to drink at a half-frozen lake, and then, a little later, the remains of a recent reindeer hunt—a pile of hooves with the fur still on them. The only other signs of human life we encountered were some ancient Inuit graves, or cairns; traditionally, Greenlanders buried their dead under mounds of rocks, a concession to the fact that most of the year the ground is frozen solid.

Humans are a remarkably resourceful species. We have spread into every region of the globe that is remotely habitable, and some, like Greenland, that aren't even that. The fact that we have managed this feat in an era of exceptional climate stability does not diminish the accomplishment, but it does make it seem that much more tenuous. As we drove back to Kangerlussuaq, listening to Pink Floyd—"Hey you, out there in the cold / Getting lonely, getting old / Can you feel me?"—I found myself thinking again about the Greenland Norse. They had arrived on the island at a moment of uncharacteristically benign weather, but they wouldn't have had any way of knowing this. Then the weather turned, and they were gone. ♦



Goose
down
robe

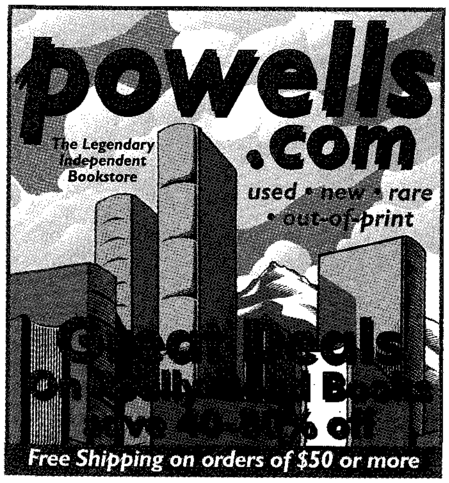
Surround yourself in warm, lightweight elegance. Supersoft easy care cotton fabric. Contrasting piping, shawl collar and roll back cuffs. Fully guaranteed. Order cream, peach, bluette, coral, navy, burgundy or teal. Sizes XS, S, M, L. Regularly $160. **Sale $89.** Shipping and handling, $7.50.

Goose Down Slippers match robes in cream, burgundy, peach, bluette, teal, navy, or coral. Sizes XS, S, M, L. Regularly $38. **Sale $22.** Shipping $4.95.

☐ Order by phone with MC or VISA, call 415/472-2154.
☐ Use MC, VISA or check for mail orders.
CA residents add 7.25% tax

WARM THINGS

180 Paul Dr., Dept. NY/San Rafael, CA. 94903
415/472-2154 • Ship within 48 Hrs. • MC/VISA
www.warmthingsonline.com



powells.com
The Legendary Independent Bookstore
used • new • rare • out-of-print
Free Shipping on orders of $50 or more

Healthy Solutions for Losing Weight

STRUCTURE
· HOUSE ·

◆ PHYSICAL HEALTH
◆ EMOTIONAL RENEWAL
◆ BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDINGS
◆ PERSONAL SUPPORT

800.553.0052 ◆ http:www.StructureHouse.com

French & Italian Holiday Rentals

Live like a European in your own chateau, villa or farmhouse. Weekly rentals. Most regions.

Call (510)559-8080 or write
2124 Kittredge St, #200, Berkeley, CA 94704
www.villeetvillage.com

VILLE ET VILLAGE®

LIFE AND LETTERS

MAYAKOVSKY'S LAST LOVES

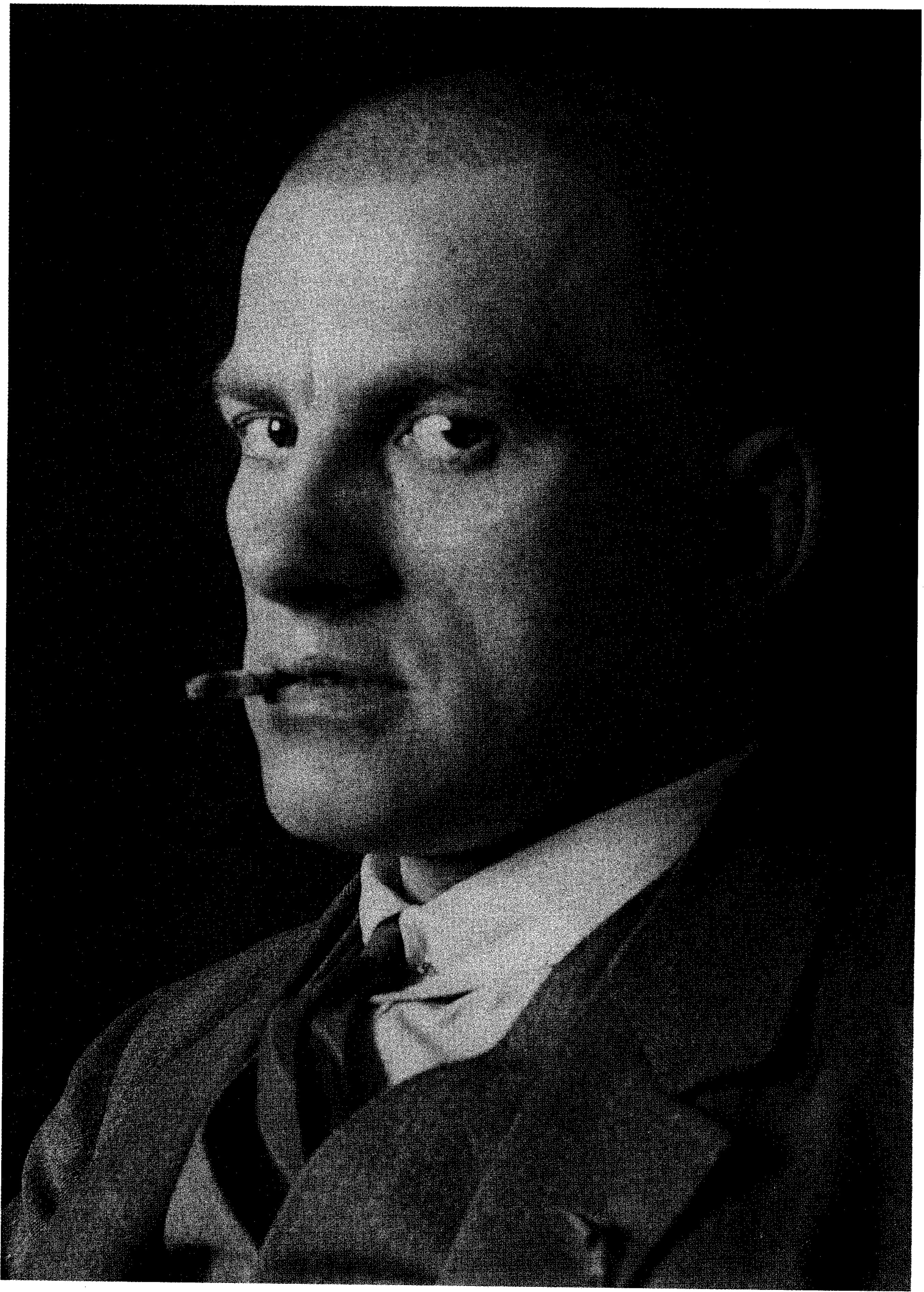
The poet's muse was in Moscow. Then he met a young émigrée in Paris.

BY FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY

There's no way you can miss him if you spend a day or more in Moscow, for his site, about a mile up from the Kremlin, is as central to Moscow as Rockefeller Center is to Manhattan. For more than forty years, a bronze statue of Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky, the Russian Revolution's most celebrated poet, has towered over the square named after him: his massive torso triumphantly arched, an imaginary wind billowing the folds of his baggy pants, he incarnates Soviet man at his most optimistic and confident, striding toward the greatest future ever devised for humankind.

Mayakovsky's statue is one of two major landmarks on Moscow's Tverskaya Street—formerly Gorky Street, for those who haven't been to Moscow since the renaming charade that began in the early nineties. It is the central artery that runs from Red Square to the Belorussky Station, and it is fitting that the only other major landmark on this thoroughfare is Pushkin Square, for Mayakovsky and Pushkin may well be the two poets most commonly memorized by Russian high-school students born after the Second World War. Never mind the dissonance between the aggressively self-assured Marxist hero embodied in the statue and Mayakovsky the man, a notoriously unbalanced genius who took his own life in 1930, at the age of thirty-six. Russian culture has always excelled at mythification, and in the long run the political gaucheness of this un-Socialist act had no more effect on the national cult of Mayakovsky than Pushkin's idiotic final duel over the honor of his foolish wife had on his.

In this nation where public poetry readings can draw thousands of listeners, the recitation of poetry is a cherished national pastime. Ask most Russian adults which verses of Mayakovsky they learned by heart in school, and, as surely as they know dozens of lines from Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin," they will spout stanzas from stirring patriotic works such as Mayakovsky's "Khorosho" ("Very Good"), "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin," and "Left March." Or, if they're under twenty-five and attended high school after the upheavals of 1991, they learned Mayakovsky's romantic lyrics, which began to replace his patriotic poems in school curricula. They might memorize love poems such as "Letter from Paris to Comrade Kostrov on the Nature of Love," or, as I heard a seventeen-year-old recite in a bar in Moscow last year, "Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva." These are poems I cannot listen to without considerable emotion, for the woman to whom they were dedicated—whom Mayakovsky



"Love, love me absolutely, please," Mayakovsky wrote to Tatiana Yakovleva (facing page). "I don't like it without you."

OPPOSITE: GLADYS PERINT PALMER; © ESTATE OF ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO/VAGA, NY/BERLINISCHE GALERIE

courted in Paris when she was a beautiful émigrée of twenty-two—was my mother.

From my adolescence on, I was aware that my mother was not only one of Mayakovsky's muses but his last great love, and that, somewhere in her possession, there was a cache of letters he had written her during their romance. But I was equally aware of my mother's extremely secretive, prudish nature, and of her profound reluctance to talk about any painful aspect of her private life. Until her death, in 1991, I responded by honoring the chill silence she cast over the poet who was a central figure of her youth—in part because of my own fear of confronting the past, and in part because, like many mothers and daughters, we lived in terror of each other.

No one protected my mother's secretiveness more fiercely than my stepfather, Alexander Liberman, the artist and publishing executive, who had been passionately in love with her for fifty years. Even though my mother had willed me all her Mayakovsky letters and documents, for eight years after her death my stepfather declined to give them to me. "Can't you see I'm too sick to think of such things?" he'd say, or "I'm too tired to remember where they are." So, whether from innate tact or Confucian subservience, I continued meekly to accept his account that the famous Mayakovsky letters were in a barely accessible bank vault, or had been misplaced among his office files.

Then, in the summer of 1999, the Mayakovsky Museum, in Moscow, informed me that it owned a large archive of letters from my mother to her own mother, who had died in 1963, having never left Russia. Sadly, my grandmother's side of the correspondence hadn't survived, but my mother's letters—which I had never known existed—described her romance with the poet in the last eighteen months of his life. I had an official invitation from the museum to be its guest while I studied this Tatiana Yakovleva Archive. But I knew that to make sense of these letters I must first retrieve and read the Mayakovsky letters my mother had left me in her will.

I went to see my stepfather at his Manhattan apartment the evening before he was scheduled to be flown to his other home, in Florida. He was eighty-six years old, heavily medicated, and very ill. As I sat at his bedside, I asked him once more if he could tell me where the letters were. His wasted silvery head lolled in various directions, as if scanning the room. "Oh, somewhere here," he said vaguely. "You should have them." With these words his eyes closed, and he fell into a deep sleep. I went home to Connecticut, but upon the counsel of my husband and a close friend I returned to my stepfather's apartment a few days later and started looking through foot-high stacks of envelopes in a corner of his bedroom. After an hour, daunted by the prospect of several days' work, I took a break. Out of some instinct, I walked over to his bedside table and opened the top drawer. There, in an ancient, half-torn envelope, marked "Mayakovsky Letters" in my mother's large, scrawling script, was the inheritance that had eluded me for years: twenty-seven pages of the poet's letters, twenty-five telegrams, and some original manuscripts of his poems.

Several months later, with photocopies of these documents under my arm, I arrived at the genteel, antiquated premises of the Mayakovsky Museum, where I was greeted like a long-lost daughter. And there, in the letters that the young Tatiana Yakovleva had written to her mother more than seventy years ago, I was reunited with my mother with an intensity that often brought me to tears. However, I must return to the poet at the center of my search, whose work I'd long known and admired, but to whom I now felt a far more intimate connection.

The youngest of three children, Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky was born in 1893 in western Georgia, in a small village called Bagdati. His father, a member of the impoverished Russian gentry, supported his family by working as a forest ranger. In 1901, the family left for the larger town of Kutaisi in order that young Vladimir—Volodia to his family—might attend a proper school. Moody, restless, quick-tempered, absorbed in books, the boy displayed an extraordinary precocity for politics. At the age of twelve, in the tumult of the 1905 Revolution, he began to steal his father's shotguns to deliver them to local revolutionary parties.

The following year, after his father died of blood poisoning—caused by a cut incurred while filing papers—Volodia moved to Moscow with his mother and two older sisters, Ludmila and Olga. The family lived on the edge of starvation, and it was there that Mayakovsky began to work with the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, whose radical wing was known as the Bolsheviks. By the age of fourteen, he was a full-fledged member of that party, with the nom de guerre of Comrade Konstantin. At fifteen, having aided in the escape of a group of women prisoners, he spent nearly a year in a Moscow jail cell, where he read Shakespeare, Byron, Tolstoy, and other classics, and began to write poetry.

His aspirations at the time were also in the visual arts, and the year after he left prison he entered the Institute for the Study of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, living in such penury that he limited his diet to two inches of sausage a day in order not to burden his family. It was at art school that the brooding, emaciated young artist met the man who became his first patron, David Burliuk, a wealthy young Ukrainian painter and poet with whom Mayakovsky pioneered the Russian Futurist movement.

Russian Futurism was born of the intellectual ferment that followed the abortive revolution of 1905. Beyond finding aesthetic forms appropriate to the machine age, it aimed above all to shock and offend bourgeois sensibility. Its manifesto, drawn up in 1912 by Burliuk, Mayakovsky, and two colleagues, and named "A Slap to the Public's Taste," called on all artists to "throw Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, etc. etc. overboard from the Steamship of modernity." One of the Futurists' tactics was to travel all through Russia disrupting cultural events—concerts, art exhibits, poetry readings—with their sheer impudence and extravagance. Their faces painted with weird landscapes, their bodies tinted white from head to toe and attired in bizarre costumes, the Futurists broke up gatherings by shouting, snorting, declaiming nonsense verse, or reading avant-garde texts such as Mayakovsky's "The Cloud in Trousers"

(1915), which had made him a succès de scandale in the Russian art world.

By the time he was twenty-two, in 1915, the flamboyant, garrulous Mayakovsky had become a celebrity. (Maxim Gorky was "so deeply touched" by "The Cloud in Trousers" that he wept on Mayakovsky's vest.) And he had developed a persona that would change little in the course of his life. Mayakovsky was over six feet tall, with a large, square jaw and the body of a football player. He had a booming street heckler's voice and, in his innumerable public appearances, argued insolently with those who challenged his ideas. Boris Pasternak, who instantly fell under the brawling young poet's spell, dramatizes him as "a handsome youth of gloomy aspect with the bass voice of a deacon and the fist of a pugilist," who "sat in a chair as on the saddle of a motorcycle" and generally reminded him of a "young terrorist conspirator, a composite image of the minor provincial characters in Dostoyevsky's novels."

But another colleague, the novelist Ilya Ehrenburg, describes Mayakovsky's eyes as those of both an "athlete and dreamer," and the poet's ferocious aura was indeed laced with a strain of great tenderness. He was a devoted son and brother, he acted toward all women with surprising courtliness, and he displayed legendary warmth and generosity toward persons of modest means or character. The reclusive Dmitri Shostakovich, who composed the music for Mayakovsky's most famous play, "The Bedbug," was struck by the poet's gentleness and "simple good manners."

He was also filled with persecution complexes, and his neediness occasionally made his presence insufferable. He dreaded solitude and was intensely jealous and demanding, wanting his friends' undivided attention around the clock, despondent when a comrade was unable to play chess with him on the evenings he wished. At a poetry reading in 1918 during which some of his most distinguished peers—Pasternak, Marina Tsvetayeva, Andrei Bely—expressed considerable enthusiasm for his verse, one stranger's coolly polite remark sent him into a deep depression. Mayakovsky boasted that he had "an elephant's hide," but in reality, as Ehrenburg summed him up, "he lived without so much as ordinary human skin."

Other idiosyncrasies of Mayakovsky's character included a passion for gambling and a hypochondriac's compulsion about physical hygiene—the latter trait a result, perhaps, of his father's fatal blood infection. He never touched doorknobs without a handkerchief, always carried a metal soap dish in his pocket, and travelled everywhere with a large folding rubber tub. Ehrenburg remembers him sipping all drinks, whether White Horse whiskey or hot coffee, through a straw, even in the most luxurious restaurants and bars.

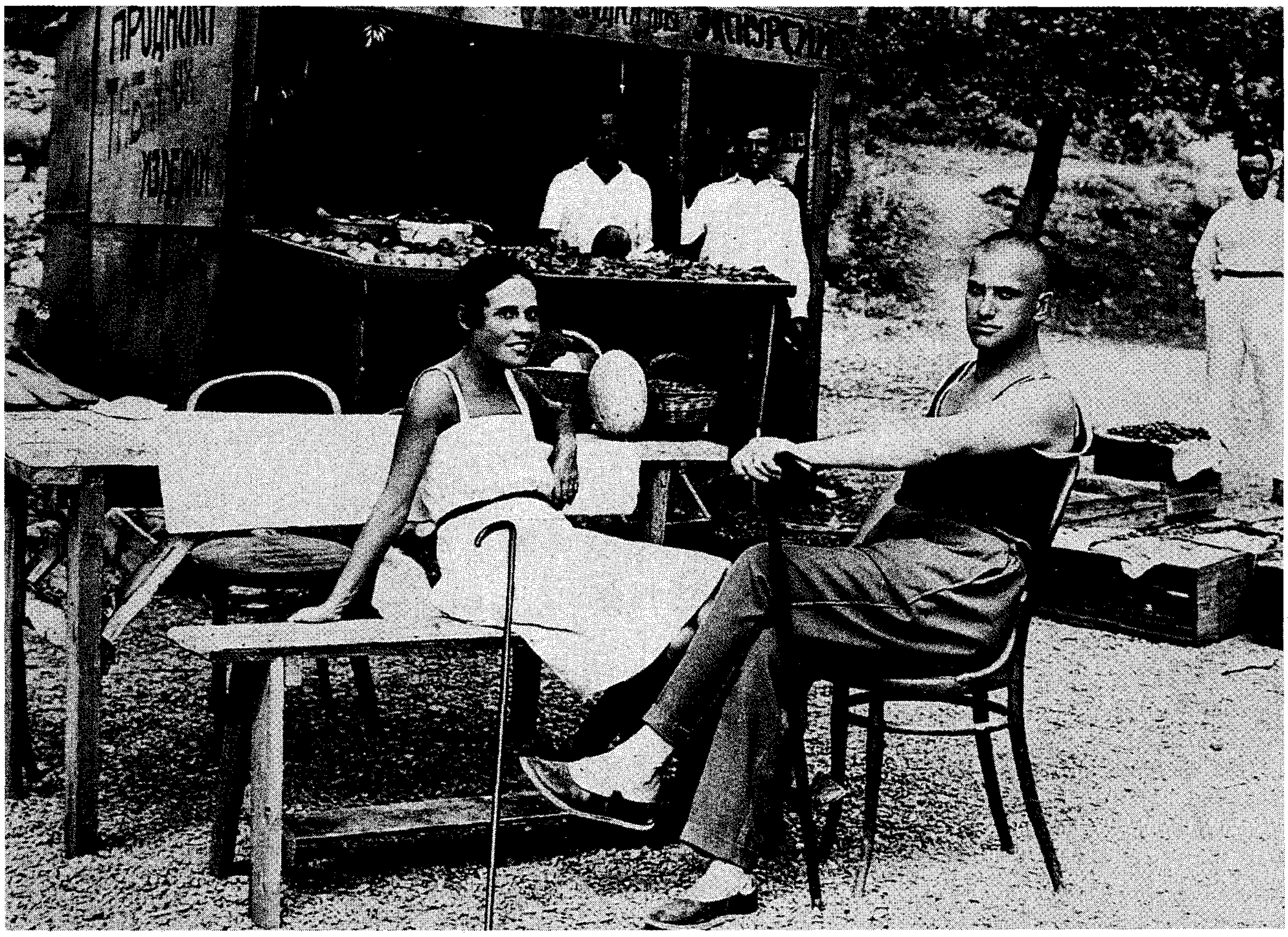
Mayakovsky's poetry accorded with his character. His imagery was apocalyptic, deliberately coarse and violent, as if presaging the cataclysmic changes that would affect Russia in 1917. In "The Cloud in Trousers," words jump into the poet's mind "like a naked prostitute from a burning brothel," the stroke of twelve falls "like a head from a block." Perhaps the most radical innovator in the history of Russian poetry, he attacked the hieratic dignity of Russian verse by stripping it of all traditional poetic diction and enriching it with shards of popular ditties, folk sayings, puns, commercial jingles, and irreverent rhyming schemes. Equally revolutionary in his use of prosody, he favored accentual

ZIEGLER
BLITZEN'S FUNERAL

verse over the syllabic-accentual meter of nineteenth-century poetry, and he often broke up his lines into step patterns to indicate the pauses for breath the reader should make when reading his poems aloud. (Throughout this text, I have made minor changes to the translations of George Reavey, Max Hayward, and Herbert Marshall.) An example from his "Conversation with a Tax Collector About Poetry," in which he affirms the political power of verse:

The line
is a fuse.
The line burns to the end
and explodes,
and the town
is blown sky-high
in a strophe . . .
The working class
speaks
through my mouth,
and we,
proletarians,
are drivers of the pen.

These innovations, and the poet's penchant for gigantism, created a hortatory art ideally suited to the immense audiences and vast public spaces that characterized Russian cultural gatherings in the revolutionary decades. However, there were two Mayakovskys. His patriotic odes expressed his rapturous joy in the violent transformation of society and his pride in the new Soviet regime; but the principal themes of his lyric poems were those of unrequited love, solitude, and self-destruction. ("I am as lonely as the only eye / of a man on his way to the blind!"; "The heart yearns for a bullet / while the throat raves of a razor.")



Lilia Yurevna Brik with Mayakovsky in Samarkand. She was determined to remain the unrepeatable love of a great poet's life.

DAVID KING COLLECTION

There was a strong streak of masochism in Mayakovsky, and the woman he fell in love with in 1915 seems to have been invented to satisfy it. Her name was Lilia (Lili) Yurevna Brik, née Kagan, and she would serve as his muse longer than any other woman.

The daughter of a prosperous Jewish jurist, the handsome, erotically obsessed, highly cultivated Lili grew up with an overwhelming ambition particularly prevalent among women of the Russian intelligentsia: she dreamed of being perpetuated in human memory as the muse of a famous poet. When she was twenty, she married Osip Brik, the learned son of a wealthy jeweller whose politics, like hers, were ardently Marxist. The two made a pact to love each other "in the Chernyshevsky manner," a reference to one of nineteenth-century Russia's most radical thinkers, an early advocate of "open" marriages. Living at the heart of artistic bohemia and receiving the intelligentsia in the salon of his delectable, red-haired wife, Osip Brik, true to his promise, calmly accepted Lili's infidelities from the start. In fact, upon hearing his wife confess that she had gone to bed with Mayakovsky, Osip exclaimed, "How could you refuse anything to that man!"

Mayakovsky's sexual relationship with Lili lasted only from approximately 1915 to 1923. But his close friendship with Osip, a noted literary scholar and a pioneer of formalist criticism, created a bond with both Briks that transcended any sexual attachment. For the rest of his life, "Osia" Brik would remain the poet's most trusted adviser, his most fervent proselytizer, and also a co-founder, with Mayakovsky, of the most dynamic avant-garde journal of the early Soviet era, *Left Front of Art*, which published artists and writers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Isaac Babel. In 1918, when Mayakovsky and the Briks became inseparable, he simply moved in with them; throughout the rest of his life, he made his home at a succession of flats that the Briks occupied. He also had a tiny studio a half-hour's walk away, next to the Lubianka prison, where he worked and carried on his numerous liaisons with other women.

Osip Brik enjoyed his own occasional flings, and the ménage à trois seemed to prosper on these arrangements. The two men rose ahead of Lili in the mornings, and had long conversations over breakfast. Before leaving the flat, Mayakovsky came up to Osip and kissed him on the top of the head, saying, "I kiss your little baldness." The Briks offered Mayakovsky both independence and the stability of a family life, which he had not enjoyed since childhood. In return, the poet became the Briks' principal breadwinner; the substantial publishing royalties and lecture fees he earned in Russia and abroad supplemented the meagre income the Briks earned through literary criticism and occasional work that Lili found in films. (This financial arrangement continued until the end of Mayakovsky's life, and led the poet's possessive, conservative older sister Ludmila to bear a lifelong grudge against Lili.)

Mayakovsky's liaison with Lili, however, was as tormented as his friendship with Osip Brik was serene. Mutual friends remained amazed, throughout the following years, by the despotic manner in which she treated him and the fearful obsequiousness with which this seemingly powerful man catered to his mistress's every wish. ("If I'm a complete rag, use me to dust your staircase," he wrote her in one particularly self-abasing letter.) For years, with her tacit approval, his poems publicly lamented her heartlessness and inconstancy—in "The Backbone Flute," of 1915, he likens her rouged lips to "a monastery hacked from frigid rock." The poet's unrequited passion for Lili even incited him to flirt with death, in 1916, by playing Russian roulette.

Mayakovsky's self-sacrificing impulses were mirrored in his politics. In October of 1917, he settled into the Revolution with greater enthusiasm than any other Russian writer of his stature. "To accept or not to accept? For me . . . this question never arose," he wrote. "It is my Revolution." For some years, repressing the expression of personal emotions, he celebrated, in rabble-rousing verse purged of Futurist excesses, the building of dams and factories, the lyricism of Soviet industrial machinery. "But now's no time / for a lover and his lass," he wrote. "All / my ringing poetic power / I give to you, attacking class." As a protégé of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Education, Mayakovsky was sent to lecture all over the Soviet Union to proselytize for the regime. This drumbeater of the Revolution was particularly adored by factory workers and younger audiences, and could draw thousands to his readings. And he is credited for having played an important role in rallying the Russian people to Bolshevism.

Beginning in 1919, during the civil war, he also used his considerable skills as a graphic artist to create governmental propaganda posters for which he devised both the design and the text, sometimes churning out several posters a day. His popular commercial jingles—he wrote hundreds of them in a single year—promoted state-manufactured macaroni products, candies, galoshes, tires: "Clothe the body, feed the stomach, fill the mind / Everything man needs at the GUM" (the government-owned department store on Red Square) "he will find," or "The best pacifiers ever sold / He'll suck on them till he's very old."

In 1924, Mayakovsky produced a three-thousand-line poem, commemorating the passing of Lenin, which was greeted with ovations wherever he read it. ("The genuine, / wise, / human, / tremendous / Lenin . . . Yet wouldn't I, / who rarely / came close to him, / give / my own life, / in a stupor of ecstasy, / for one little breath / of his?") Throughout the nineteen-twenties, Mayakovsky was also sent to numerous foreign countries to propagandize his nation's achievements. In 1925, he even travelled to the United States, where he remained for several months and fathered a daughter by an American woman of Russian-German descent, Elly Jones.

But the frantic pace of the poet's patriotic activities, the tensions between his private and public personae, and the suppression of his selfhood for the greater glory of Communism took their toll in deepening depressions. By the mid-twenties, his odes to the regime were beginning to display an alarmingly masochistic servility. ("At such a time / what foolish blockhead / will rave / the word / 'Democracy'?! / . . . an iron dictatorship—/ is the key to victory." "I want, / at the shift's end, / the Factory Committee / to shut my lips / with a padlock and key.") Increasingly, he realized that by channelling all his energies into the Revolution he was threatening to ruin his monumental talent.

Furthermore, like all cult figures, he was inciting as much envy and resentment as admiration. From the mid-twenties on, the more doctrinaire Communists, whose power was growing in literary circles, began to criticize Mayakovsky for his "bourgeois individualism," and this hostility only deepened his despondency. "Only a very great, true love might still save me," he told his close friend Roman Jakobson, who later became a preëminent literary critic. Jakobson looks on 1928, when Mayakovsky met Tatiana Yakovleva in Paris, as a pivotal year in which the poet "broke," when "living alone had become intolerable to him, when he felt the need for an enormous change."

By 1928, Lili Brik's younger sister, Elsa Triolet—a shrewd, winsome émigré writer who was devoted to her sibling—had been living in Paris for eight years. Since Mayakovsky's first trip to France, in 1922, she had acted as Lili's Paris spy, reporting on the poet's romantic escapades. But his foreign affairs did not give the sisters much cause for alarm until October of 1928, when he set off for Nice to see Elly Jones, his former American lover. She had brought the daughter she bore him, now two years old, for a first visit with her father. Brik and Triolet were alarmed by the trip, and fearful that the poet might be persuaded to follow mother and child to the United States. To distract him from the American menace, Elsa decided to introduce Volodia to a beautiful, bright young Russian émigrée of her acquaintance—my mother. On October 25th, the very day of his return from Nice, Elsa took the poet to visit a Paris internist who had close links to the émigré community. She had learned from the doctor's wife that Tatiana Yakovleva had an appointment with him that morning.

The sisters' scheming misfired. Volodia took one look at Yakovleva and fell head over heels in love with her. Upon one of the few occasions my mother mentioned Mayakovsky to me, she said that he insisted on taking her home from the doctor's in a cab, spread his coat over her knees to keep her warm, and, after depositing her at her front door, fell on his knees to declare his love. "Yes, on his knees on the sidewalk," my mother would reiterate when telling the story, "and it wasn't even lunchtime yet."

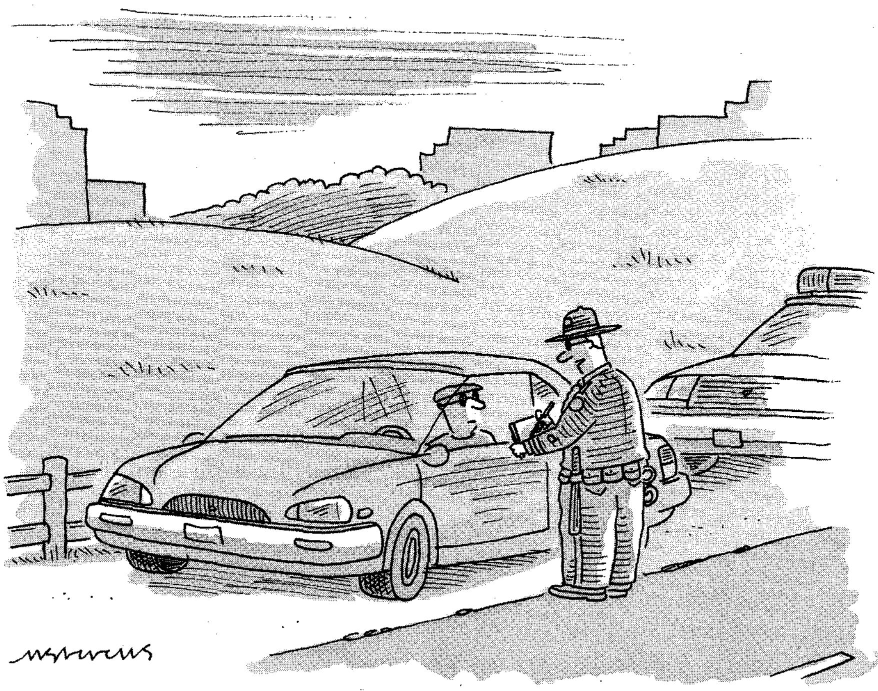
Tatiana Yakovleva, thirteen years Mayakovsky's junior, was born in St. Petersburg in 1906, the offspring of several generations of somewhat eccentric artists and intellectuals. Her father, Alexei Evgenevich Yakovlev, was an engineer and architect who was one of the first persons in Russia to own a private plane (its name was Mademoiselle). Her paternal grandmother was one of the first women in Russia to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics. Her mother, who helped to support the family during the Revolution by teaching ballet, spoke four languages with little accent. When Tatiana was five or so, she moved with her parents, her younger sister, Ludmila, and several governesses and other domestics to the town of Penza, a thirteen-hour train ride southeast of Moscow, where her father had been commissioned to design a network of state theatres.

Life soon grew difficult for the Yakovlev girls. In 1915, their parents divorced; their father left for America via China, and their mother was remarried to a prosperous pharmaceutical manufacturer who lost all his money at the onset of the 1917 Revolution. The family was left destitute, and their survival grew all the more precarious in 1921, when famine affected southeastern Russia with particular savagery and Tatiana's stepfather died of tuberculosis and malnutrition. The three women lived in one room, burning precious books for fuel. My mother remembered spending those days making the rounds of open-air markets and thrift shops to sell whatever furniture and linens remained in the household. Notwithstanding an extremely limited formal education—owing to the Revolution, she had little schooling after the age of twelve—she had a remarkable talent for memorizing poetry, a skill whose honored status the Revolution never altered. By the age of fourteen, she could recite from memory hundreds of lines of Pushkin, Lermontov, Blok, and, of course, Mayakovsky. In the early twenties, she helped her mother and sister to survive the famine by standing on street corners reciting poetry for groups of Red Army soldiers and receiving hunks of bread from them in return.

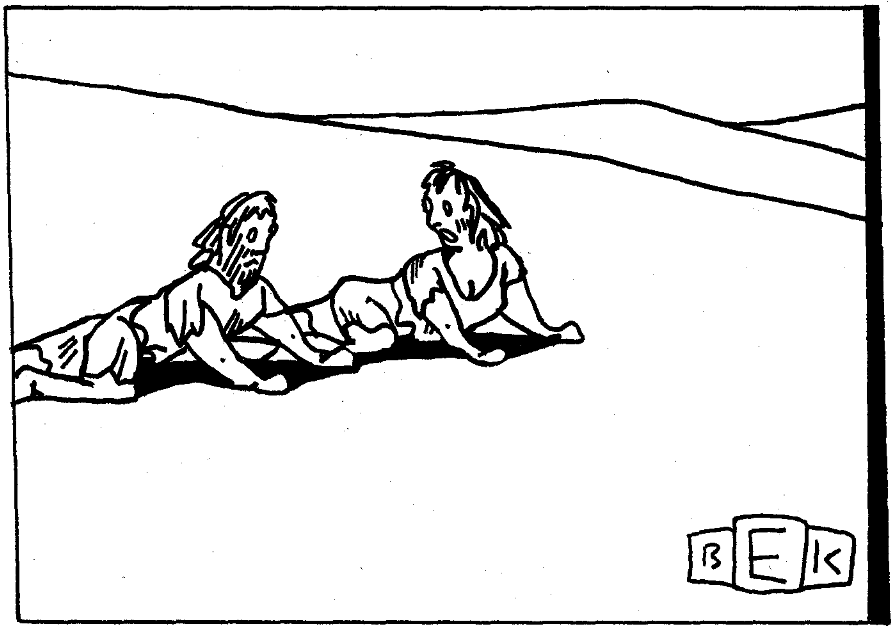
In 1928, when Mayakovsky met her in Paris, Tatiana had just recovered from a serious case of tuberculosis. Tall, blond, animated, industrious, vain, extremely snobbish in her adulation of both nobility and intellectual achievement, she was living with three loving relatives who had emigrated to Paris in the early nineteen-twenties: her paternal grandmother, the retired mathematician; her aunt, an opera singer; and her uncle, the painter Alexandre Iacovleff. In 1925, they had managed to get Tatiana a visa to France on medical grounds. As soon as her health improved, she began to contribute to their modest household finances by working as an apprentice to a hat designer. Tatiana loved high fashion and was skilled at making a bit of rabbit skin and fake beads look like something out of *Vogue;* she had won many hearts in Paris, and led a busy social life, but she was determined to keep her virginity until marriage.

She missed her homeland dreadfully. "I Love Love Love Russia," she had written to her mother the year before she met Mayakovsky. "Paris may be the dream spot of the world, but I'm only a guest here and nothing will ever take the place of my native land, which I so love and treasure and revere." The poet allayed her homesickness: their mutual attraction was so powerful that, from the moment they met until Mayakovsky's visa expired, in early December, they saw each other every day.

Tatiana, who was severely chaperoned by her rabidly anti-Communist relatives, had to do a lot of fibbing to carry on her courtship with the Soviet poet. Lying outrageously to her doting babushka, she enlisted a few loyal friends to say she was going to their house. "Babushka would have had a heart attack if she'd learned whom I was dining with every night," she recalled fifty years later, emphasizing the sacrifices her relatives had made to get her to Paris. "The Bolshevik and her granddaughter, smuggled with great difficulty out of a starving Russia turned into hell by the Revolution!"



"Shall I put you down for a state trooper cap, T-shirt, or coffee mug?"



"This isn't really about water. It's about what's going on between us."

But Bolshevism didn't seem to pose a problem for the lovers in the nostalgic landscape of Paris's émigré community. Tatiana's anti-Communist scruples were apparently absolved by the narcissistic pleasure she took in the love of a famous poet; Mayakovsky seems not to have spoken of world events to her. And his infatuation only deepened when he discovered Tatiana's extraordinary knowledge of Russian poetry. Sitting with him at the various cafés they frequented—La Coupole, Le Voltaire, La Rotonde, Le Dôme, La Closerie des Lilas—she recited poetry by the hour. How could he not have been seduced when he heard her speak out the whole of his own "The Cloud in Trousers"—some seven hundred lines? He told all his friends that Tatiana had "absolute pitch" for poetry. She became his confidante, as Lili had been for years. He informed her of the nature of his relationship with the Briks, and she seemed to take it in stride. She even helped him to find a dress for Lili and to purchase a four-cylinder gray Renault that Lili had asked him to bring back for her from Paris.

The poet proposed marriage within two weeks, a suggestion that Tatiana seems to have received in a mood of cool noncommittal. Over a lunch at the Grande-Chaumière, in Montparnasse, during those November weeks, he presented her with two poems he had composed during the past days and had dedicated to her. They were written in a neat, slanting hand in a small green notebook, which I now own. One was called "Letter from Paris to Comrade Kostrov on the Nature of Love," the other "Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva." A sample line from the first one, which recalled their meeting in the doctor's office:

Picture this:
a beauty
all framed in furs
and beads,
enters a drawing room.
I
seized this beauty
and said:
—did I speak right
or wrong?—
Comrade,
I come from Russia;
I am famous in
my land;

"Comrade Kostrov"—the first poem he had ever dedicated to any woman other than Lili Brik—was the most passionate love lyric Mayakovsky had written in years. And it intimated that he had found that "very great, true love" which, as he'd told Roman Jakobson, might yet save him:

To love
means this:
to run
into the depths of a yard
and, till the rook-black night,
chop wood
with a shining axe. . . .
to us
love
tells us, humming,
that the stalled engine
of the heart
has started to work
again.

"Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva" was even more explicit, urging her, in no uncertain terms, to return to Moscow with him:

Come to the crossroads
of my big
and clumsy arms. . . .
In one way or another
I'll take
you
by yourself
or along with Paris.

The couple were both striking in their statuesque beauty, their magnetic, powerful presence. Beyond their passion for poetry, they shared many predilections and character traits, chief among which was their generosity, their narcissism, and the exhibitionism with which they each cloaked their shyness and deep insecurities. As Tatiana introduced Mayakovsky to her French and émigré acquaintances—who included Cocteau and Prokofiev—the couple's increasingly public romance was not lost on Lili's sister, Elsa, who lived in the same Montparnasse hotel as the poet and was beginning a lifelong relationship with the French writer Louis Aragon. Back in Moscow, Lili fretted, informed of Paris events by Elsa (and perhaps also by the secret police, which already thought of all important Soviet travellers abroad as potential defectors and kept close track of them). "Who is that woman Volodia is crazy about . . . to whom he's writing poems (!!) . . . and who is said to faint when she hears the word '*merde*'?" Lili wrote her sister, referring to Tatiana's notorious puritanical streak.

Lili would find out soon enough. Mayakovsky's visa was to expire in early December, and he had no choice but to go back to Moscow. Although he was scheduled to return to Paris in May, after the first run of his play "The Bedbug," his separation from Tatiana seems to have been extremely sorrowful. Before leaving Paris, Mayakovsky went to a florist's and ordered that a dozen roses be sent to her every Sunday until his return; every bou-

"We saw the Great Wall and lots of pagodas, and I have a transplanted stomach."

quet was accompanied by his visiting card, each one bearing a different message.

In the first of many letters my mother wrote to her mother from Paris about Mayakovsky, which have never been fully published in English, Tatiana's grief at her separation from Mayakovsky is mitigated by a naïve pride at being his new muse. "He's a remarkable man, totally different from the way I'd imagined him to be," she wrote shortly after the poet's departure. "He's wonderful to me, and it was a great drama for him to leave here for at least six months. He telephoned me from Berlin, and it was one shout of pain. I receive a telegram every day, and flowers every week. . . . Our entire house is filled with flowers. . . . I felt extremely sad when he left. He's the most talented person I've ever met. . . . I think you'd be interested in hearing the poems 'Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva,' and 'Letter on Love.' "

She felt all the more drawn to Mayakovsky because he reminded her so poignantly of Russia. "When I was with him I felt I was in Russia, and since his departure, I long even more for Russia. But all of this I write to [you], my *mamulen'ka*, and to no one else. He left me two copies of 'my' poems, I'm sending you one. For the time being don't show these [poems] to anyone. They'll be published soon. When he read them here they had a colossal success. They belong to his very best lyrical work."

Some time later, in response to a letter from her mother, she continues to flourish her status as the poet's muse:

> However spoiled I am, he was absolutely amazing in his thoughtfulness and concern for me and I long for him terribly. . . . Most of the folks I meet here are "society people" who have no desire to use their brains. . . . M. challenged me . . . he stretched my mind. . . . The masses here court him, his poetry captivates even the French with its rhythm and the power of his reading. . . . [M.] evoked in me such a longing for Russia and for all of you. Literally, I almost came back. And now everything seems petty and flat. He's such a colossal figure, both physically and morally, that after him, there is literally a void. He is the first man who has been able to leave his mark on my soul.

Mayakovsky was writing to Tatiana with equal fervor. It was in his Futurist temperament to prefer telegrams to letters—they got there faster—and he sent her at least one a week. "Write more often got your letters am writing miss you incredibly love you kiss you your Vol," one of his cables of that season read. "Received your letter thank you sent you letter books," went another. "Have a cold miss you love you kiss you my own Vol." As for the letters, they came every few weeks. The first of them was begun on December 24th, a few weeks after his return to Moscow.

> My own beloved Tanik.
>
> Letters move so slowly, and I need to know every minute what is on your mind. That's why I send you telegrams. Send me piles of both! I take such joy in each word you write, I received one of your letters just now. I read it until I was saturated with it. . . . I have written a new play ["The Bedbug"] twenty hours a day without food or drink. My head swelled so from this labor that my hat ceased to fit. . . . I work like an ox, my muzzle bent, red-eyed. . . . Even my eyes gave up. . . . I still have to put cold compresses on them. But it's nothing . . . it doesn't matter about my eyes, I won't need them until I see you again because outside of you there's no one to look at.

The next lines communicate his insistence that she return with him to Moscow. Mayakovsky, however, seems to be aware that Soviet censors may be perusing his correspondence with an émigrée, and his references to marriage are oblique and often coded:

> Still mountains and vastnesses of work—as soon as I'll finish it I'll rush to you. If my pen and I collapse from all this business you will come to me. Yes? Yes?? You're not a Parisian, you're a true working girl. In our country all must come to love you, and everyone is obliged to be happy [when you return]. I'm carrying your name like a holiday flag on our urban buildings. It is flying and waving above me and I don't lower it for a millimetre. Your poem ["Letter to Comrade Kostrov"] is being published in *Young Guard*. I'll send you the issue.

Mayakovsky was usually honest with his women. Upon returning to Moscow, he had confirmed Lili's suspicions about the beautiful Russian émigrée and read her his "Tatiana poems." "You've deceived me for the first time," Lili said, furious that he had defied her long-held resolve to be his one and only muse. A short time later, he told her over dinner at the flat they shared that he wished to marry Tatiana and bring her back to Russia. Lili responded by smashing a precious piece of china.

Mayakovsky's second letter to my mother, written on New Year's Eve of 1929, alludes to Lili's fierce jealousy:

> Sweet Tanik, my beloved . . .
>
> I don't like it without you. Think about it and collect your thoughts (and then your belongings) and adjust your heart to my hope—to take you in my paws and bring you to us, to me in Moscow. Let's think about it and then talk. Let's make our separation a test.
>
> If we love each other, is it good to exhaust heart and time working through the telegraphic poles?
>
> It is the 31st now at 12 midnight and . . . I'm totally saturated with melancholy longing. Tender comrade, I clinked glasses and proposed a toast to you, and Lilia Yurevna chided me, "If you're suffering so, why not immediately run to her?" Well, I shall run to you, but for the time being I must press on with my work. I work until my eyes get blurry and my shoulders crack. . . . When I'm totally exhausted I say the word "Tatiana" and return to my paper. You and the other sun, you will later comfort me. . . .
>
> To work and to wait for you is my only joy.
>
> Love, love me absolutely, please. I hug and love and kiss you.
>
> Vol

(This diminutive of Volodia was a play on words. In Russian, *vol* means "ox," an animal with which the poet particularly identified, and in whose semblance he often caricatured himself in his letters and greeting cards.)

Lili Brik was not the only person worried about the romance. Stalin had come to absolute power at the end of 1928 and had immediately tightened government control of the press. The poem Mayakovsky had dedicated to Tatiana, "Letter to Comrade Kostrov," came under severe critical censure when it was published. What kind of bourgeois decadence had the poet fallen into, celebrating the beauty of an émigrée "framed in furs and beads"! Even my grandmother seems to have expressed concern about the romance, for the tone in which Tatiana wrote her a month after Volodia's return to Russia was highly defensive:

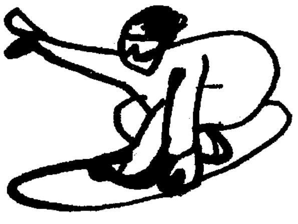
> I've not at all decided to come back to Russia, or, as you say, to "throw myself" at him. And he is not coming to "pick me up" but to see me. . . . Don't forget that your little girl is already 22, and that few women in their whole lives have been as loved as I have been in my short one. (This is something I inherited from you. Here I have a reputation of being a "femme fatale.")

The young woman enjoyed flaunting her success to her mother. But she was also torn by two conflicting emotions—the pleasure she took in her safe, glamorous Paris life and her temptation to return to suffering Russia, and the loved ones who remained there:

> Moreover, on the whole I don't want to get married now: I'm too attached to my freedom and my independence—my hat business, my "orangerie" (my room is always filled with flowers). Various admirers want to take me to various countries, but of course none of them seem like anyone at all compared to M., and I would almost certainly choose him above all others; how wise he is! And the possibility of seeing you again plays a large role in all this; by moments I long for you terribly.

Then comes the first intimation that Tatiana, unbeknownst even to her closest confidante—her own mother—is furtively keeping a few Parisian men on the back burner who might offer her a comfortable high-society marriage. "Furthermore I'm living through all kinds of dramas," she writes her *mamulen'ka*, "there are two other suitors, it's a vicious magical circle."

As for Volodia, seemingly unconcerned with the criticism of his "Comrade Kostrov" poem, he rushed back to Tatiana on February 14th, three months earlier than he had promised, not even waiting for the reviews of "The Bedbug." The lovers' reunion seems to have been as idyllic as their first meeting. They again saw each other daily, and even travelled a bit together, going to Le Touquet for a weekend. He wrote more poems to Tatiana—short ones this time, in a style parodic of nineteenth-century verse, which he signed "Marquis WM" (a teasing allusion to her fondness for titles). My mother detected a change in him. "He did not criticize Russia directly," she recollected a half century later, "but he was obviously disillusioned." This impression coincides with the recollections of a Russian friend with whom the poet spent an evening during a brief, financially disastrous gambling trip to Nice, and before whom he broke into sobs, saying, "I've already stopped being a poet. . . . Now I'm a . . . functionary."



In April, Mayakovsky's visa ran out once more, and he was forced to return to Moscow. The couple decided to meet again in Paris in October, when Tatiana would make up her mind about marrying him. She had given him a Waterman pen as a going-away present. Their farewell lunch, held at the Grande-Chaumière the day of his departure with a group of their mutual friends, had the aura of an engagement party.

The first surviving letter of Mayakovsky's after his return to Russia is dated May 15th, and seems to address some pique she had expressed toward him:

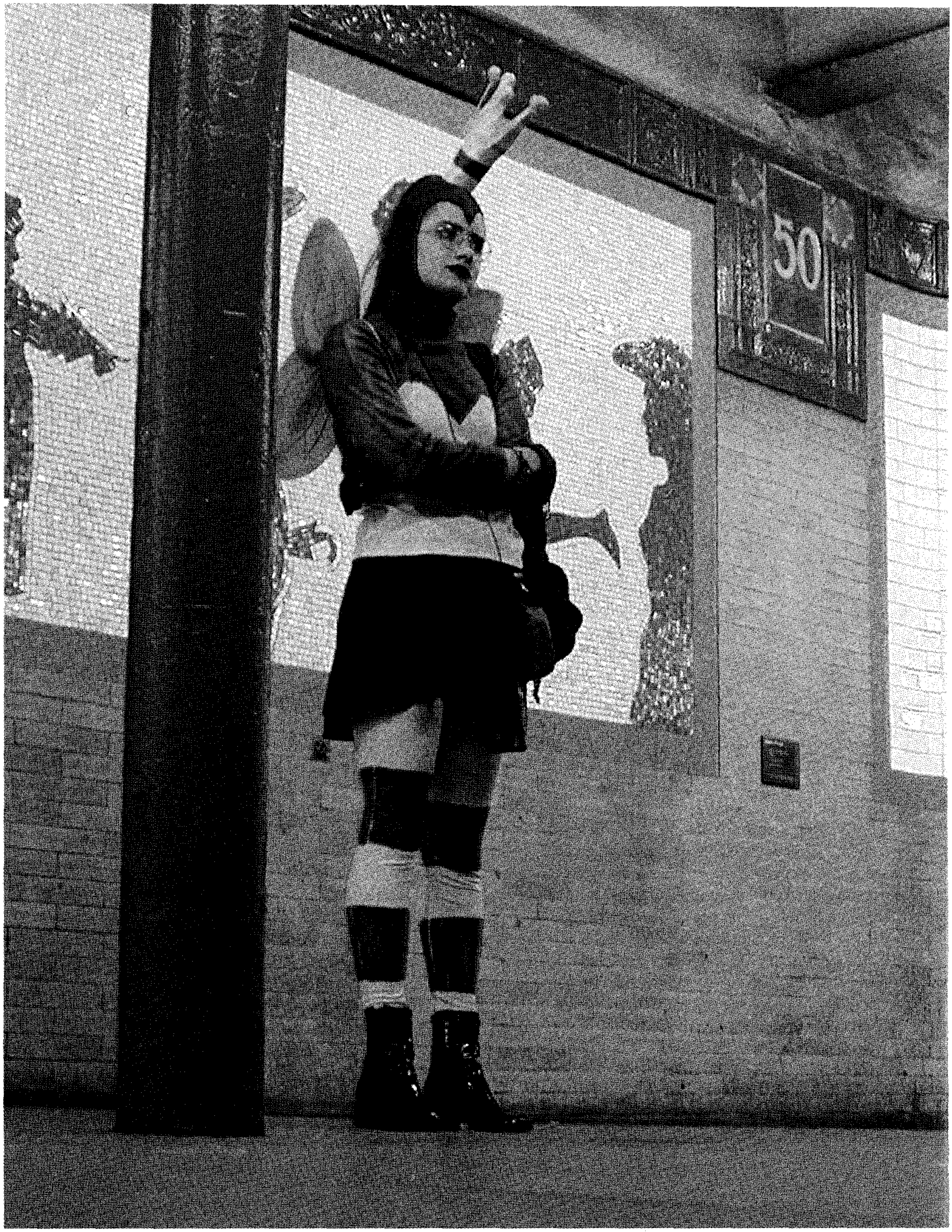
> My dear, sweet, my own and beloved Tanik,
>
> Only now has my mind cleared, and I can think and write a little. Please don't scold and yell at me, there have been so many unpleasantnesses, from the very smallest (bug) size to the elephant size—that you mustn't be upset at me. I'll begin in order:
>
> I absolutely and enormously love Tanik.
>
> I'm only beginning to work, I will now write my Bathhouse [Mayakovsky's last play].

A few lines follow in which he sums up the strikingly generous arrangements he intended to make for her mother—a prodigality that was not lost on Tatiana—and informs her that he's soon going off on a lecture tour of the Crimea. The letter continues:

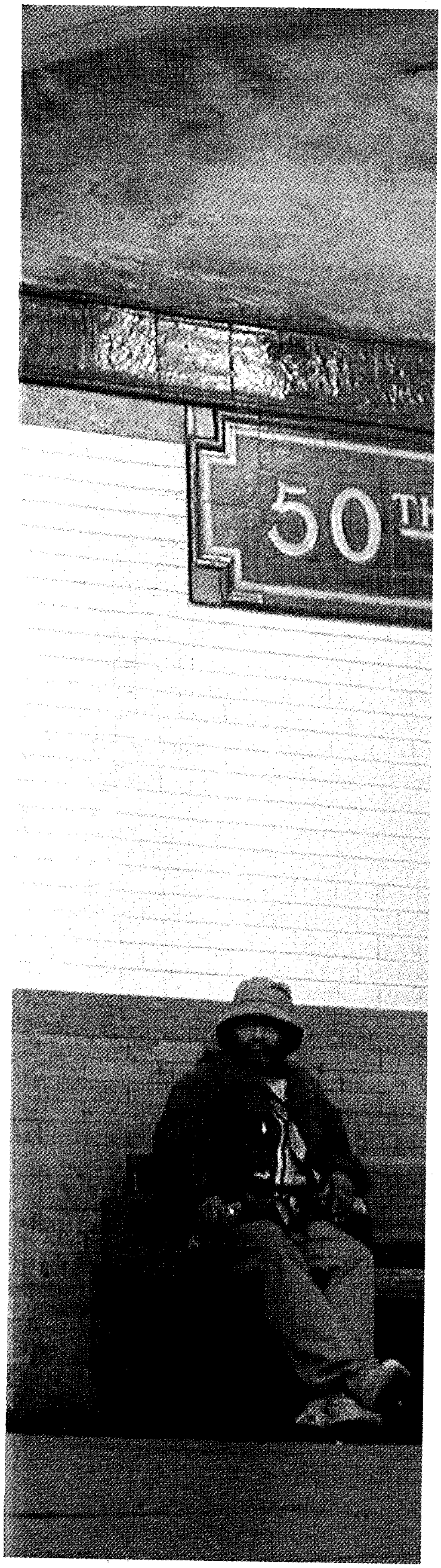
> Without your letters I can't go on. . . . I'm longing for you as never before. . . . I love you always and entirely. Very and absolutely—
>
> Your Vol

Another letter came in June. This time, Tatiana seems to have complained that he was sending her more telegrams than letters:

> My dear, my own, sweet, and beloved Tanik.
>
> You promised to write every 3 days. I waited waited waited. I crawled under the carpet but the letter was two weeks old and a sad one. Don't get sad, little girl. It can not be that we are not ordained to always be together. . . . You're constantly saying that I don't write you and what are my telegrams, puppy dogs??. . . .
>
> I jump into work, remembering that until



SHOWCASE BY PETR PETR *As a newcomer to New York, New York, the Czech artist rides the subways with a digital camera, capturin*
like this one, from Halloween, with the platform of the downtown No. 1 line serving as a tripod. "It's been difficult for me to settle here," Pet



housands of Alice in Wonderland instants—
ays. “Looking at the people, it helps.”

> October there isn’t that much time. . . . My lovely, own Tanik don’t forget me because I love you so much, and I’m so longing to see you. I kiss all of you, your Vol.
>
> Write to me!!!

By the end of that month, both of them are complaining that they aren’t receiving any letters. And one is led to wonder to what degree Russian security services might have blocked the correspondence between the Soviet Union’s poet laureate and his émigré love. One also wonders whether Lili Brik, who had full access to his studio on Lubiansky Passage, might have intercepted his mail.

Tatiana’s longing, that summer of 1929, seems to have been as deep as the poet’s. “Write me and let me know his mood and how he looks, I long for him terribly,” she writes in July to her sister, Ludmila, a destitute aspiring actress in Moscow. At around the same time, in a letter to her mother, she refers to the magnanimous way in which Mayakovsky was continuing to provide for her relatives in Russia. (Upon Tatiana’s request, he had brought clothes for her sister and sent her some money.) Now he had organized a trip to the Crimea for her ailing mother, which, to Tatiana’s sorrow, her mother had initially declined, probably out of pride:

> V.V. also wrote me a sad letter; he had hoped . . . to arrange this for you. After all, the best thing that he can do for me (during such a long absence) is to look after you and Liloshka. . . . And it is this attribute of his that I particularly treasure; a limitless kindness and concern. I await his arrival in the autumn with great joy. There aren’t other people of his calibre here. In his relationship to women in general, and to me in particular, he is an absolute gentleman.

“Absolute gentleman” would remain an all-important phrase in my mother’s vocabulary until her death. On the rare occasions she talked about Mayakovsky, she unfailingly stated that he was “a man of irresistible charm and sex appeal,” with “a rare sense of humor,” a man, moreover, who was “extraordinarily careful about my virginity,” as she primly put it. His “exquisite” manners, his “tenderness and concern” for her, his elegance and perfect taste in clothes (“he reminded one more of an English aristocrat than a Bolshevik poet”) made him the most “absolute gentleman” my mother had ever met. But there’s no way of knowing whether she would have retained that opinion of the poet if she’d known of the life he led in Moscow after his return from Paris.

Throughout the thirteen years that Mayakovsky and the Briks had shared a home, Lili—who went through many men a year—tolerated the poet’s affairs, even approved of them, as long as they remained lighthearted. But Volodia supported the Briks, and his marriage would have threatened their financial stability. There was also Lili’s determination to remain the unrepeatable love of a great poet’s life. So, in the spring of 1929, once Tatiana Yakovleva had entered into Mayakovsky’s poetry, Lili realized that she was dealing with her most serious rival to date. Seven months earlier, she had mobilized her sister to counteract the threat of the American girl. This time, she turned to her husband to make the decisive move.

In May of 1929, within two weeks of Mayakovsky’s return from Paris, Veronika (Nora) Polonskaya, a pretty twenty-one-year-old actress of the prestigious Moscow Arts Theatre, received a call from Osip Brik. Polonskaya, a pert, dimpled blonde who was married to a popular older actor of that company and was just beginning to rise in its lower ranks, was somewhat surprised to hear from Brik, with whom she had only a brief acquaintance. He was proposing an outing to the horse races with Vladimir Mayakovsky on the following day—would she join them? Nora, like many married women in Russian intellectual circles at the time, seemed to lead a very independent life. She accepted.

Lili had been on target: Volodia began to pursue Nora relentlessly. Although she was initially put off by his brusqueness, upon their first tête-à-tête the young woman was taken by his “gentle, delicate” manner, and by his commitment to Bolshevik principles. Soon “Norochka” was returning the poet’s infatuation, and coming to his studio on Lubiansky Passage every day.

As I read through Nora Polonskaya’s memoirs at the Mayakovsky Museum earlier this year, I was, for the first time, rather confused by the state of the poet’s emotions. After all, this was a man renowned for his sincerity and forthrightness, a man who had never been dishonest or duplicitous with any woman, or, for that matter, with any male comrade. By this stage of my research, I had grown very fond of Vladimir Vladimirovich, and I tended to invent excuses for him whenever his conduct was questionable. Well, I rationalized on this occasion, Volodia needed some immediate satisfaction and consolation; my mother would probably not have tolerated the truth, and there was a romantic streak in him which wished to preserve the purity of their romance from being sullied by that truth. But his affair with Polonskaya was made all the more perplexing by the ardor of a letter he wrote to Tatiana on July 12, 1929, just before he left for his lecture tour of the Crimea, where he planned to meet with Nora:

> Tanik, I've begun to miss you terribly, terribly. You must notice yourself that you almost do not write to me. Does it bore you?
>
> My child, write me please and promise to visit me if I will need it badly. Give me until October (we've both decided), and then I can't imagine being without you. From September on I'll begin to make wings to fly to you. Do you still remember me? I'm so tall, pigeon-toed and antipathetic. Today I'm also gloomy.
>
> My own beloved Tanik, don't forget that you and I are *rodnye* [kin to each other] and that we are each essential to the other.
>
> I hug, love and kiss you
Your Vol

The word *rodnye* is a loaded and deeply tender one. *Rod* means "family, birth, origin"; and when used by lovers *rodnye* implies that the loved one is "one of my own family." These are words that no man would use toward a woman for whom he has an exclusively physical attraction, and they give an added depth of tenderness to Mayakovsky's letters. He uses *rodnaia* again as he once more reproaches Tatiana for not writing to him, and tries to speed her return with yet another salvo of praise for Soviet society:

> My own beloved Tanik,
>
> Excuse me for writing so often. You see, I don't pay attention to your silence. Why do you, *rodnaia*, take so many counts on our exchange of letters? . . . We are now better off than people have been at any time, in any place. Such a huge communal work has never been known in human history, Tanik! You're a super-capable girl. Become an engineer. You can do it, don't spend yourself entirely on hats. . . . I want this so much, Tanka the engineer somewhere in Altai [a mountain chain in Central Asia]. Let's do it, right?
>
> Dear child, write and love. I kiss you and love you. I want to see you sooner.

The notion of my frivolous, luxury-loving mother returning to an increasingly frugal Russia to build Socialism as an engineer in Central Asia always strikes me as comical. On the other hand, the last of Mayakovsky's letters to have survived, written on October 5, 1929, often brings tears to my eyes:

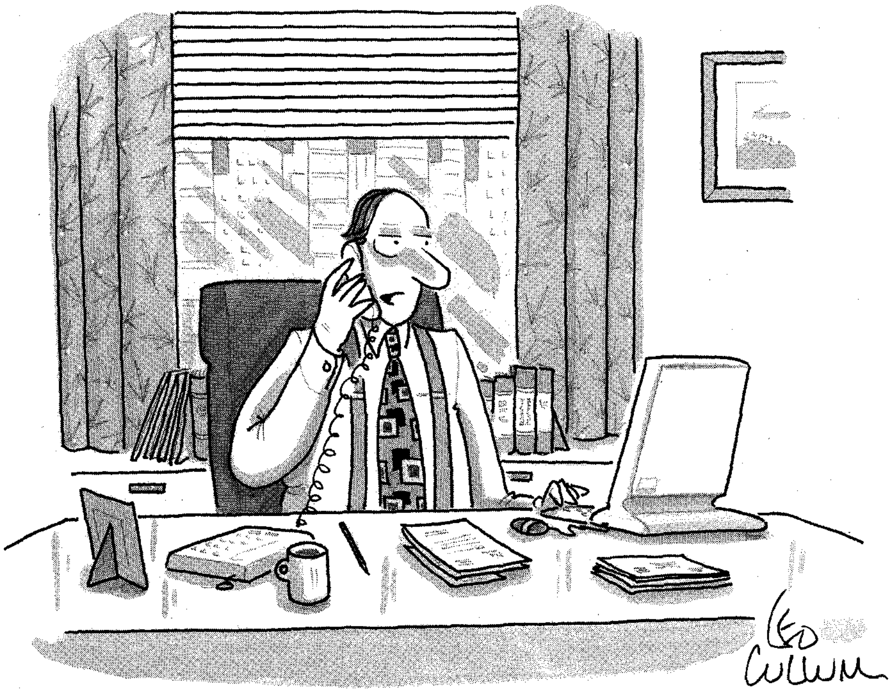
> My own beloved. I don't have and could never have any other endearments for you. Keep this word in mind for at least 55 years.
>
> Could it be true that you don't write only because "I'm not very generous with words"? This is absurd—it is impossible to describe and document all the sorrows that make me even more silent. Or even more likely, could it be that French poets, or people of more common professions, are now more pleasing to you? . . .But if that's the case then no one at any time will ever convince me that you have grown apart from me.
>
> My telegram to you was returned with a message that they could not find you at that address. Write, write, write, dear child. I still don't believe that you've grown indifferent to me! Write today! Books are piled up and other news which are making little screams and begging to go into your paws.
>
> I kiss you, love you
Your Vol

Mayakovsky's references to "all the sorrows that make me even more silent" have everything to do with the events of 1929, which Russians refer to as *god velikogo pereloma*—"the year of the great transformation." It was in 1929 that the relatively relaxed and pluralistic first decade of Soviet culture came to a definitive end. To follow the dénouement of Mayakovsky's romance with my mother, one needs to grasp that year's pivotal importance.

The last months of 1928 had marked the ascendance of Joseph Stalin to unchallenged power in the Communist Party hierarchy and the beginning of his violent transformation of Soviet society. This entailed, among other measures, the forced collectivization of Soviet peasantry, a series of "five-year plans" to return the management of all enterprises to the central government, a resumption of cultural isolation from the West, and—most relevant to Mayakovsky—the imposition of strict Party controls over education and culture. In January of 1929, Stalin banished Leon Trotsky from the Soviet Union, and soon began to single out cultural organizations and particular writers for opprobrium. And by that autumn Stalin's regime was making it increasingly difficult for Soviet citizens to travel abroad.

This "Revolution from Above," as it is called, also enabled the Soviet Union's most oppressive literary faction, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (or RAPP), to gain ascendance over literature. In December of 1929, an editorial in the Communist Party paper *Pravda* demanded that all Soviet writers sup-

"It's not fair that I have to get up and live the day I already had nightmares about."



"I won't be able to handle your account anymore, as it suddenly appears that you're a small investor."

port RAPP and adopt its edicts, which required a strict adherence to proletarian values, and the elimination of all "bourgeois" and "deviationist" writing. This is the context within which Mayakovsky, in the early fall of 1929, was either denied a visa to return to Paris to resume his courtship of my mother or else warned that he should not even risk the political dangers of asking for one.

The autumn of 1929 is also that moment at which any precise rendering of Mayakovsky's romance with my mother becomes extremely difficult, and falls prey to conjecture and to aging survivors' capricious memories of the past. But, whatever versions are accepted, it is clear that the same historical forces that were about to cleave asunder, for many decades, the two Russias—the increasingly rigid Soviet state, and the beloved lost homeland of émigré communities throughout the world—were central to the finality of the lovers' separation.

My mother's version of the dénouement goes as follows: Shortly after she received that last, October letter from Mayakovsky, she heard from Elsa Triolet that he had been denied a visa. (Although Tatiana's ferocious pride kept her from ever admitting it, it is probable that Triolet, at her sister's suggestion, had also advised Tatiana of his romance with Polonskaya.) Smarting from that revelation, warned by friends of the growing repression in Russia, and recalling the poet's repeated hints, in whatever letters had got through to her, about all the great "difficulties" he had been having, she decided, sorrowfully, that their future together was doomed. And she set about making other plans for her life. One of the two persons in the "vicious magical circle" of suitors she had mentioned earlier that year to her mother was a dashing French diplomat four years her elder, Vicomte Bertrand du Plessix, a specialist in Slavic languages who for the previous year had been posted as an attaché at the French Embassy in Warsaw. In mid-October of 1929, when he returned to Paris for one of his rare home leaves, she accepted his offer of marriage.

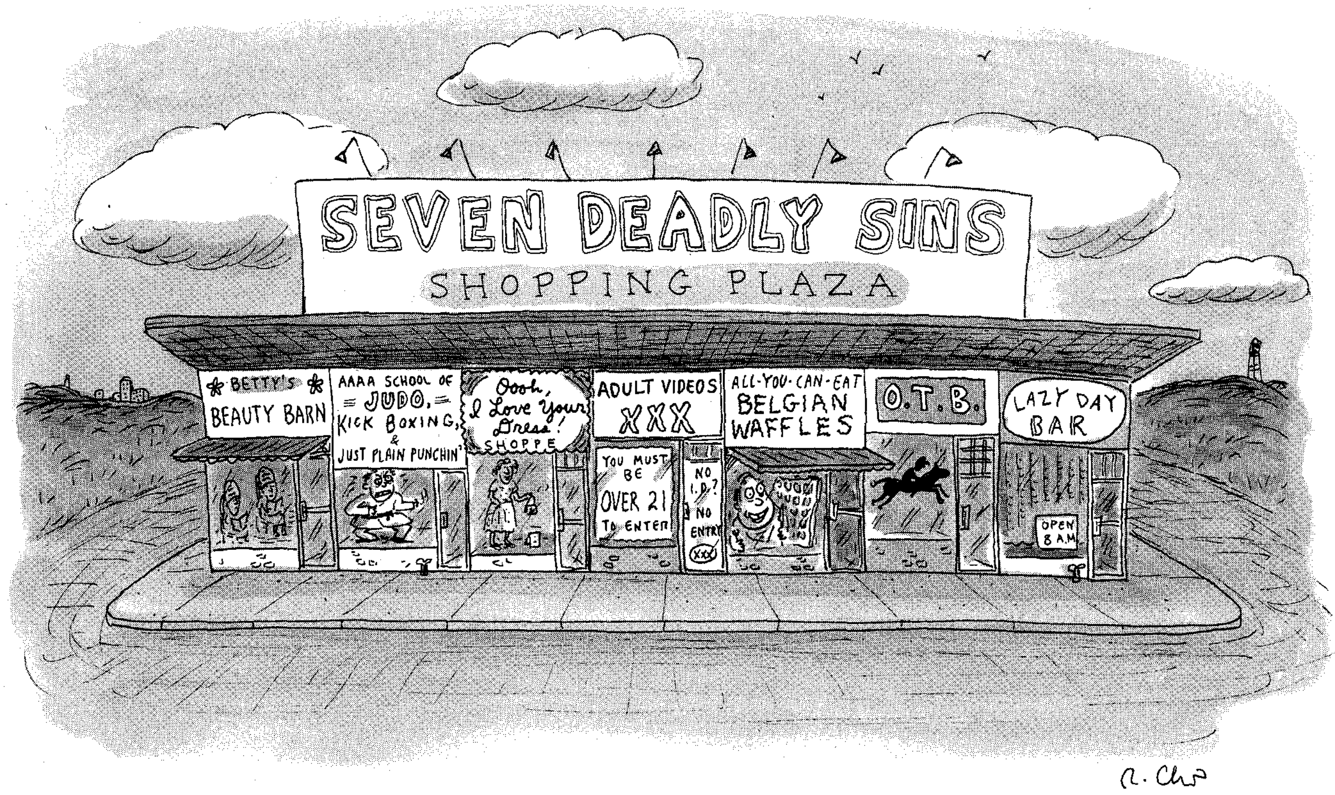
Unfortunately, between mid-October and late December, the period during which my mother must have first mentioned du Plessix in her letters to Russia and announced her engagement and pending marriage, there is a gap in her correspondence with her mother: no letters have survived. Documents at the Mayakovsky Museum reveal that the secret police made several visits to my grandmother's flat in Penza in the nineteen-thirties and absconded with letters she had received from abroad. Whether by coincidence or by design, the visitors seized all letters written by my mother in the last two and a half months of 1929. Her last October communication, posted on the fifteenth of that month, tersely states that "Mayakovsky is not coming this winter." There are no more letters until late December, after her marriage to du Plessix. So, for the autumnal phase of the romance, it is instructive to hear out Lili Brik, who in 1968 recalled in a letter the October evening upon which Mayakovsky first heard of my mother's engagement:

> We were quietly sitting in the dining room on Gendrikov Street. Volodia was waiting for his car, he was about to go to Leningrad for several appearances. . . . A letter came from Elsa. As always, I started to read the letter aloud. Along with the various other events that Elsa was sharing with us was the news that Yakovleva, with whom Volodia, out of sheer inertia, was still in love, was engaged to marry some French viscount or other, that she was going to marry him in a church, in a white dress and orange blossoms, that she was very concerned that Volodia not learn about this because he might cause a scandal.

Brik then pretends that she would not have read that passage to Mayakovsky if her sister had warned her properly. She continued:

> Volodia's face darkened. He stood up and said: "Well, time to go." "Where are you off to?" I asked, "it's early, the car hasn't come yet." But he took up his suitcase, gave me a kiss and went out.

Lili's account of the poet's state of mind also included the recollections of his chauffeur, who related that upon meeting him that night Mayakovsky had uttered a curse, then remained silent during the ride to the station. "Do excuse me, do not be angry at me, Comrade Gamazin," he said as they arrived. "Please, my heart is aching." The following day, Lili Brik decided to follow Mayakovsky to Leningrad to boost his morale. As they rode together from one crowded reading to another, Brik reports, Mayakovsky kept making derisive comments about French nobility—whatever his growing difficulties with the Soviet regime, he was vexed that he had been upstaged in the affec-


SEVEN DEADLY SINS
SHOPPING PLAZA
BETTY'S BEAUTY BARN
AAAA SCHOOL OF JUDO, KICK BOXING, & JUST PLAIN PUNCHIN'
Oooh, I Love Your Dress! SHOPPE
ADULT VIDEOS XXX
YOU MUST BE OVER 21 TO ENTER
NO I.D.? NO ENTRY
XXX
ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BELGIAN WAFFLES
O.T.B.
LAZY DAY BAR
OPEN 8 A.M.
R. Chast

tions of the woman he loved by an aristocrat. " 'We're not French viscounts, we work hard,' he would say. Or, 'If I were a baron . . .' " The news of Tatiana's impending marriage seems to have greatly embittered him.

As for Tatiana's recollections of October, 1929, they are excerpted from a series of conversations with the closest friend she had in her last decade of life, the Russian scholar and ballet historian Gennady Smakov. Smakov was planning to write a biography of her, and she spoke more candidly with him about the past than she had to anyone thus far:

> I loved [Mayakovsky], he himself knew it, but . . . my love was not strong enough to go away with him. And if he'd returned a third time I'm not absolutely sure that I wouldn't have left . . . I missed him terribly. I might well have left. . . . Fifty-fifty. . . . [I got married] in order to untie the knot. In the fall of '29, du Plessix came to Paris and started courting me. Since Mayakovsky could not come I was totally free. I thought that he did not want to take on that responsibility, to be stuck with a young woman . . . I thought to myself, perhaps he just got scared? . . . [du Plessix] came openly to [my grandmother's] house—we had nothing to hide, he was a Frenchman, a bachelor, it wasn't Mayakovsky. I married him, and he was amazing towards me.

"Did you love du Plessix?" Smakov asks. A long pause follows.

"No, I didn't love him," she replies. "It was a flight from Mayakovsky. Clearly, the frontier was closed to him, whereas I wanted to build a normal life, I wanted children, do you understand? Francine was born nine months and two days after the wedding."

My parents were married on December 23, 1929. My mother's letters to my grandmother resume again six days later, during her honeymoon, which was spent in Italy. In the first letter, posted in Naples, she describes her wedding. Her uncle, Alexandre Iacovleff, had given her away, and her wedding dress had been "*kolossal'nyi uspekh*," "a colossal success." She and Bertrand were about to set forth for Pompeii. Bertrand was "very caring, a tender husband and a marvelous companion."

Within three years, they were estranged, and my father would die with the Free French in the Second World War. Perhaps he sensed that she had not loved him. Perhaps he was the first to realize that Mayakovsky had been the only great love of Tatiana's life.

Mayakovsky's last months brought a succession of heartbreaks. His play "The Bathhouse," a violent attack on the increasingly rigid Soviet bureaucracy that, in his view, was betraying the 1917 Revolution, was received with what one eyewitness described as "murderous coldness." But the public's animosity was becoming far more personal. Even though he seldom used the car he had sent back for Lili the previous year, and had to get her permission each time he wished to borrow it, he was being censured for owning such a luxurious possession. He was even criticized for the pen of foreign make he always carried on him—the Waterman that had been my mother's parting gift. His exhibition "Twenty Years of Work," which opened on February 1, 1930—posters, paintings, graphics, diverse editions of his books—was boycotted by all official writers' groups, and was visited almost exclusively by students. He paced the empty rooms, with a "sad and austere face, arms folded behind him." ("Just think, Norochka, not one writer came!" he complained to Polonskaya.) One day in January, he read his ode to Lenin at the Bolshoi Theatre in the presence of Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov, but this honor did not cheer him. The winter of 1929-30 appeared to be a year of artistic failures. He felt increasingly isolated, and Polonskaya wrote that, with the exception of his poem "At the Top of My Voice," he was experiencing a true writer's block. That poem, in which he describes himself as "a latrine cleaner / and water carrier, / by the revolution / mobilized and drafted" and laments that he had been "setting [his] heel / on the throat / of [his] own song," is as telling a comment as any on his disillusionment.

In the winter months shortly after my mother's marriage, Mayakovsky, according to Nora Polonskaya, began pressing her to leave her husband and marry him. But after the New Year their affair went through a difficult phase: she had been pregnant with his child and had an abortion; afterward, she was sexually indifferent to him. Friends noted that a mood of "helplessness, loneliness, heartache . . . had come over him," and that for the first time in his life he was drinking heavily.

In February, 1930, in the midst of this emotional disarray, Mayakovsky further alienated his old friends by joining RAPP, the Party-led literary organization, which had begun to attack the more independent Soviet intellectuals for their "anarchism" and "Trotskyist deviation." RAPP, which Osip Brik had urged him to join as a way of allaying his isolation, was looked on with horror by the writers he most honored. But even that sinister group reacted disdainfully to Mayakovsky's move: its officials placed him in a small section of minor and beginning writers, and assigned him to the humiliating process of "reëducation." Audiences heckled him increasingly at his readings, and even students—traditionally his most devoted fans—had begun to tell him that his poems were unintelligible. Moreover, the Briks' home had ceased to offer him relief from solitude: Osip and Lili had gone to England at the end of February; it was the first time since they had all lived together that both of them were away. He had no one but Nora to turn to. He insisted she remain with him at every moment of the day. Bitter arguments arose because she wanted to look after her own career.

On April 11, 1930, for the first time in his life, Mayakovsky failed to appear at a reading he had been scheduled to give. On April 13th, he telephoned several friends to see who was free, and was pained to hear that they were all busy. "It means that nothing can be done," he muttered to the sister-in-law of one colleague. He ended up by going to the home of his friend Valentin Kataev, who describes the following scene: Volodia and Nora spent the evening writing each other notes on little bits of cardboard torn out of a chocolate box, which Mayakovsky, who drank more than usual that night, tossed across the table to Nora with the gesture of a roulette player. At 3 A.M., they went to their respective homes. In the morning, Mayakovsky came by to pick her up and take her to his apartment. According to Nora's memoirs, they quarrelled a great deal—he pressured her to remain with him, while she insisted that she had to go to rehearsal.

At 10:15 A.M., barely able to free herself from her lover's grip, Nora ran out of his room. A few seconds later, as she was beginning to go down the corridor, she heard a pistol shot. She hastened back into his room. It was still filled with smoke.

Mayakovsky had been rehearsing this act in his poetry since his adolescence. "It might be far better for me / to punctuate my end with a bullet," he had written in 1915. Yet, when the suicide actually occurred, it had the impact of a national disaster. Pasternak's description of the mayhem caused in Moscow by the poet's death is now a classic:

> Between eleven and twelve the waves were still flowing in circles round the shot. The news made the telephones tremble, covered faces with pallor, and urged one towards the Lubiansky passage, across the courtyard into the house, where the staircase was already choked with people from the town and with the tenants of the house, who wept and pressed close to one another, hurled and splashed against the walls by the destructive force of the event.

Pasternak's analysis of Mayakovsky's suicide is particularly lucid: "Mayakovsky shot himself out of pride because he had condemned something in himself . . . with which his self-respect could not be reconciled."

The poet's suicide was not as sudden as it initially seemed. He left a note, written in pencil in a large, clear hand on three pieces of white paper, which he'd apparently started composing two days before his death. "To All" ("*Vsem*"), it began. "Do not blame anyone for my death, and please, no gossip. The deceased always detested gossip. Mother, sisters, friends, forgive me—this is not the way (I do not recommend it to others) but there is no other way out for me."

The suicide note went on to dictate that all his papers be taken care of by the Briks. Documents at the Mayakovsky Museum indicate that a highly placed official of the secret police, whose building was adjacent to the poet's studio, was the first of Mayakovsky's acquaintances, after Nora, to rush into his room. He seized a great many of Mayakovsky's papers and a few days later handed most of them to the Briks, who had received the news in Berlin and immediately came home.

"I'm rummaging in Volodia's little papers," Lili wrote a friend a few weeks after the tragedy, "and sometimes it seems to me I do what I have to do." It is widely assumed by Mayakovsky scholars that Lili burned my mother's letters within a few weeks of the poet's death. "It was outrageous for Lili to burn my letters," my mother said in 1981 in one of her talks with Smakov. "I forgave her because she confessed to it in a short note which was delivered to me by a Soviet professor. . . . But I don't understand why she did it. Was it jealousy? Why should she destroy all the traces and tokens of his love for me? If that was her intent, she should have destroyed the poem 'Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva'. . . well, that was not in her power."

There was one possible token of Mayakovsky's love for my mother which Lili did not choose to destroy, however—a poem found, untitled, among recent entries in his notebook, which is now considered one of his greatest love lyrics. This, in fact, was the poem from which he borrowed several lines for his suicide note (I have italicized them below):

Past one o'clock. You must have gone to bed.
The Milky Way streams silver through the night.
I'm in no hurry; with lightning telegrams
I have no cause to wake or trouble you.
And, as they say, the incident is closed.
Love's boat has smashed against the daily grind.
Now you and I are quits. Why bother then
to balance mutual sorrows, pains, and hurts.
Behold what quiet settles on the world.
Night wraps the sky in tribute from the stars.
In hours like these, one rises to address
The ages, history, and all creation.

Only one word of the poem was changed: the phrase "Now you and I are quits" was altered to "Now life and I are quits."

My mother heard about Mayakovsky's death when she was four months pregnant with me. She was in Warsaw, where she had settled with my father after their honeymoon. Her relatives in Paris had cabled my father, asking him to keep her from reading any Russian newspapers. But in most European cities the news made the front page.

"I was utterly destroyed by today's newspapers," she wrote in her first bereaved note to her mother. "It was a terrible shock. . . . You'll understand."

My grandmother seems to have expressed concern that her daughter was taking too much of the blame for the poet's death, for two weeks later Tatiana wrote:

Mamulechka moia rodnaia,

I don't think for a minute that I was the reason, except perhaps obliquely, for the true cause was his psychological crisis . . . there was a multitude of reasons, plus his illness. Over here also a lot is written about him, but how little was known about him as a person. Only now are people becoming aware of that, they are saying: "We have overlooked the most important thing—the powerful sources in his soul that led him to such an end."

Bertrand kisses you. He was very loving and tender, and, for a Frenchman, very aware of my suffering. . . . I kiss you endlessly, many times.

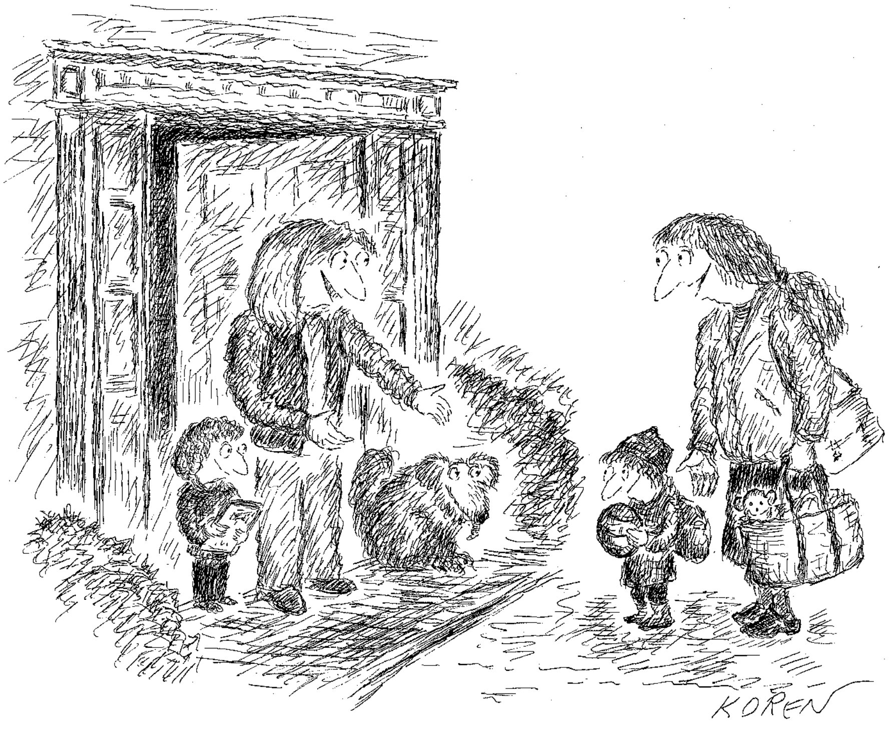
Your Tania.

(The baby is already moving.)

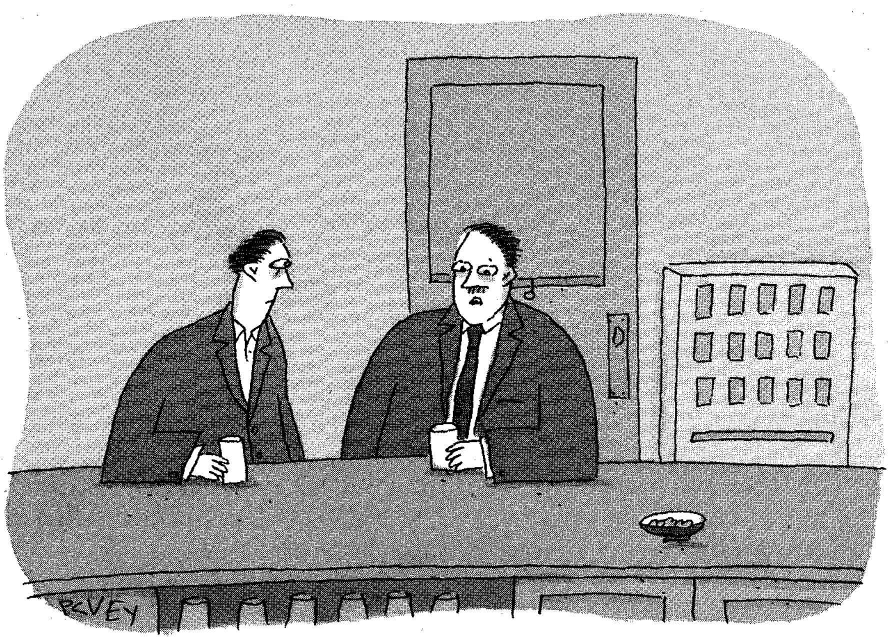
For a few years after his suicide—which was criticized by many as a most un-Socialist act—publication of Mayakovsky's work was reduced to a trickle. In the face of the growing Stalinist repression, the Soviet literary establishment was hedging its bets about what stand to take on him. And, however one may feel about Lili Brik, one cannot deny that she and her husband were exclusively responsible for reviving a public cult of the poet. In 1935, with the help of Lili's then lover, a high-ranking Army general, they got a letter through to Joseph Stalin which asked him to rehabilitate Mayakovsky, reminding him that the poet's verses were "the strongest revolutionary weapon." Stalin replied quickly, writing directly upon the upper-left-hand corner of Brik's letter—in red pencil, in a bold, large, slanting hand—"Comrade Brik is right: Mayakovsky was and remains the most talented poet of our Soviet epoch. Indifference to his memory and words is a crime." The following day, Stalin's comments appeared as headlines in the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, *Pravda,* and from then on Soviet citizens were ceaselessly reminded of Mayakovsky's civic virtues, and were taught that he was the one and only "poet of the Revolution." For years, public squares, schools, subway stations, tractors, minesweepers, and steamships were named for him. In Pasternak's scornful phrase, Mayakovsky was "propagated compulsorily, like potatoes in the reign of Catherine the Great."

Two years after Stalin's apotheosis of Mayakovsky, in 1937, in the middle of the great purges to which the poet, had he been alive, would surely have been one of the first to succumb, the Soviet government installed a Mayakovsky museum in the flat that he had shared with the Briks. But in the Soviet Union literature seldom remained untainted by politics. The poet's older sister Ludmila had long been determined to minimize in her brother's life the role of "the nightmarish and monstrous" Lili Brik, and to promote, instead, my mother. She began her campaign during the cultural ferment of the first post-Stalin decade, when the Soviet regime's iconic poet, with ironic justice, had grown to be a symbol of creative freedom, and Mayakovsky Square had become a meeting place for human-rights activists and for readings of "unofficial" writers.

As part of her anti-Brik campaign, Ludmila persuaded the government to move the Mayakovsky Museum out of the Briks' former flat and install a far grander one in the building on Lubiansky Passage where he had had his studio, and where he had ended his life. A warm letter from Ludmila to my mother in 1967 informs her that some time earlier she had asked a friend to visit my maternal grandmother. On this



"Cathy, this will be an easy sleepover for you—
Ben doesn't take any medications at all."



"Doris and I have an unspoken agreement, but she won't tell me what it is."

visit, Ludmila writes, her friend had received a large collection of my mother's letters and other family documents, which he had passed on to her. This collection, indeed, now comprises the Mayakovsky Museum's Tatiana Yakovleva Archive.

Because of her inscrutability and her immense powers of seduction, my mother was the kind of woman who inspired a multitude of legends (and even deceits, as in my stepfather's case). And the myths that accreted about her have posed surprising annoyances for me whenever I've returned to Russia. There was a widespread rumor in the nineteen-seventies, for instance, that I was Mayakovsky's daughter, a myth in part traceable to a memoir of Mayakovsky written by the poet's oldest friend, David Burliuk, when he was approaching eighty and may have been in his dotage. "In December [of 1929] or January, 1930," Burliuk alleges, "Tatiana . . . gave birth to a girl who was Mayakovsky's daughter.' " (I was born in September, 1930, more than sixteen months after my mother's last parting with the poet.) The allegation came to haunt me in 1979, when I travelled to the Soviet Union to take part in a Soviet-American literary conference. On a night train bound for Tbilisi, Georgia, two of my Soviet colleagues came into my compartment and for some hours tried to convince me that I was the poet's daughter. As dawn broke, I confronted them with the date on my passport. "This would have been an elephant's gestation!" I exclaimed. "Someone faked your passport," my Soviet colleagues parried back.

Fifty years after Mayakovsky's death, upon one of the occasions when Gennady Smakov prodded my mother to speak about Mayakovsky and the impact of his suicide on her life, she had this to say:

> I've not been able to reread his letters since his death. Even now I can not. . . . What I felt was far worse than grief. It was the most dreadful mourning.

Only in the past months, after reading this exchange in the context of my recently discovered family documents, did I understand why my possessive stepfather, who had worked hard to create the legend that he was the center of Tatiana's universe, preferred to withhold the poet's letters from me. Only now have I begun to see why my mother, who loved me deeply, also preferred that I not probe too far into her romance with the kind, doomed poet: Mayakovsky's death had been the central fissure, the principal tragedy of her life. And she did not want me to share her "most dreadful mourning" for him, at least not while she was still alive: perhaps she wished to keep this mourning for herself; perhaps she wished to protect me from it.

And perhaps she was right to try to do so. Probing my mother's personal history—sensing the pain of her enforced separation from Mayakovsky, learning that she never truly loved my own heroic father, knowing how close she came to returning to Russia and becoming one of the millions lost in Stalin's purges—has created a state of inner havoc that I'm only beginning to come to terms with. And yet, in the process of researching this episode of my mother's past, Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky has truly become my *rodnoi*—a beloved lost kinsman, whom I now think of and grieve for often, but who finally fulfilled his wish to speak to "the ages, history, and all creation." Through him, I may well have come into the most treasured part of my inheritance—my mother's grief.

My mother was not one to continue bearing grudges against any of Mayakovsky's friends. In the mid-nineteen-seventies, upon hearing that Lilia Yurevna Brik had been ill, my mother wished to send her a sign of conciliation. (Brik, who was crippled with pain after suffering a hip fracture, committed suicide in 1978, at the age of eighty-six.) One evening in Paris, my mother was dining in her hotel room with a mutual friend of hers and Brik's, Pierre Bergé, who was about to go to Moscow and had asked her whether she wished to send anything to her fellow-muse. She went into her bedroom and brought back a small white handkerchief, neatly folded. "Just give this to Lili, and she'll understand," she said, handing him the kerchief.

Bergé flew to Moscow the following day, went to visit Lili Brik his first evening there, and handed her the white handkerchief. "Tatiana says you'll understand," he said.

Lili gravely nodded her head. "I understand," she said.

The white flag, in most cultures, is a symbol of peace. For Lili and my mother, the white kerchief also became a sign of shared mourning. ♦

LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

THE DREAMER

In a time of violence, no one is speaking the language of Shimon Peres.

BY DAVID REMNICK

Mahmoud al-Zahar is a surgeon in Gaza City. Born in Gaza and trained in Egypt, he specializes in diseases of the thyroid. Several mornings a week, he lectures at the local university. On the wall around his house, there is no announcement of his medical or academic credentials but, rather, a graffito in red spray paint that hints broadly at another of his vocations: "There is a great difference between the one who writes history with a pen and the one who acts it out in blood." Everywhere in the Gaza Strip—in Gaza City, in the Jabaliya refugee camp, in Khan Younis; everywhere but in the anomalous and fortified Jewish settlements—the walls speak the same language: defiant slogans of uprising against Israel; pictures of exploding buses and the young "martyrs" who did the job. Dr. al-Zahar speaks that language. He is one of the leaders of and spokesmen for the Islamic Resistance Movement, which is better known as Hamas.

Gaza is by far the poorest and most desperate of the Palestinian territories. The rutted streets are filled with sewage and garbage. Very few men have jobs, and the children are left to invent games out of life's scraps. I saw a group of boys in sandals or bare feet scurrying around the streets collecting spent machine-gun cartridges; there was no shortage of them. Compared to Gaza, the West Bank city of Ramallah is suburban Connecticut. Hamas, like despair itself, is a growth industry in Gaza.

A friend and I buzzed at the doctor's gate. An adolescent boy wearing a dusty sweater greeted us sternly and led us inside to a darkening living room. It was late afternoon.

"Come in, please, sit down," the doctor said. "Sit down here."

Al-Zahar is fifty-seven, with a delicate, bearded jawline and thinning hair cut close to his skull. He wore a long light-brown robe and curled himself into an armchair. Earlier in the day, I'd dropped by the apartment of another Hamas leader, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, where there were guards with Kalashnikovs on one floor and, in the living room above, a few family members watching intifada highlights on al-Manar, the official television station of the Hezbollah in Lebanon. Here there was only the unguarded Dr. al-Zahar. And he was nothing if not curious about his guests.

"'David'?" he said at one point. "That's a Jewish name, isn't it?"

Al-Zahar lives across a narrow dirt road from a mosque and not far from his superior in Hamas, a wheelchair-bound cleric named Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Ever since the Sheikh founded Hamas, during the first intifada uprising in Gaza, fourteen years ago, the group has steadily gained popularity. Much of this has to do with an ever-increasing fury at the Israeli occupation, but it has also become an article of faith among Palestinians that the Palestinian Authority, under Yasir Arafat, has siphoned off many millions of dollars in foreign aid. Although Arafat remains the symbol of Palestinian resistance, the P.A. as a whole is seen as aloof, compromising, and corrupt, and so Hamas, which calls for an Islamic Palestine, portrays itself as devout, absolutist, pure. That morning, there had been funerals in Gaza for six Palestinians, most of them young Hamas sympathizers, who had been shot by Arafat's police. Under pressure from the United States and the Israeli government, which had declared him "no longer relevant," Arafat was trying to crack down on Hamas, although Hamas, and its willingness to carry out "martyr operations," has often proved useful to him.

Al-Zahar seemed pleased by Arafat's predicament. He was wanted by Arafat's police, but he refused to surrender himself and seemed confident that if they came after him hundreds, if not thousands, of his supporters would defend him. "I am not afraid," he said. Soon our conversation came around to the disintegration of Israeli-Palestinian relations since 1993, when the two sides signed the Oslo accords, which called for mutual recognition and augured a Palestinian state comprising Gaza, the West Bank, and perhaps some portion of Jerusalem as its capital. The doctor smiled indulgently.

"Look," he said. "We will be happy to take any square metre of land from the Israelis—the West Bank, Gaza—that they are prepared to give us, but that doesn't mean we'll renounce our rights to all of Palestine."

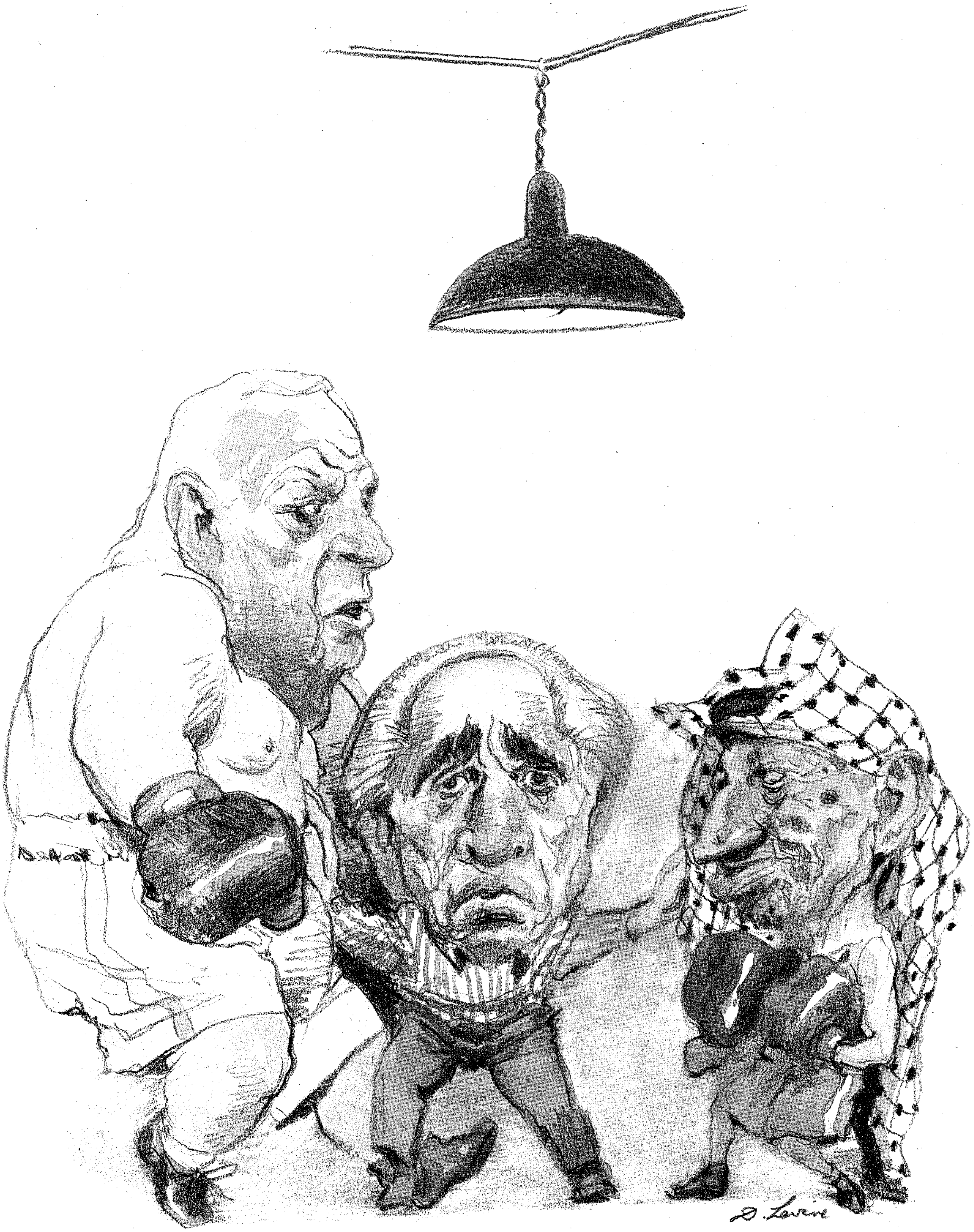
Then what are your real goals? I asked him.

"What is the final goal of Islamic peoples everywhere?" he said. "It is to establish an Islamic state in Palestine, in Egypt, in Lebanon, in Saudi Arabia—everywhere under a single caliphate. There is no role for a Jewish state in this. I would ask you: What role is there for a Jewish state in the United States? In California? Well, in Los Angeles you may have one. In Brooklyn, yes." A knowing laugh. "But what happens in your country if they are asked to establish a Jewish state?" He made the point plainer still: "We will not tolerate a non-Islamic state on Islamic lands. We cannot allow that. Anwar Sadat was assassinated because he refused to implement Islamic law—Sharia—as Egypt's constitution."

At the same time, the doctor wished to reassure his guests. "We are not enemies of the West," he said. "It would be a historic crime for America or the West to consider Islam the enemy. Islam is not looking for a new enemy. Islam is working for the spread of virtue, whether by David or Muhammad. We are calling for the purification of the world." "Purification" was a word he used often. There would be no Israel, al-Zahar insisted, but Jews needn't worry: "It is well known that the only system in the world with no discrimination is Islam."

The young boy brought around a tray

DAVID LEVINE



"Sharon feels like a winner," Peres says. "Me, I don't think there is any win except peace. Nothing else is important."

loaded with small cups of steaming sweet coffee. We drank in silence and then the conversation turned to the blowing up of Israelis in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa. It might have been expected that a leader of Hamas would declare to his guests that the recent Osama bin Laden tape had been "fabricated" ("All your sophisticated technology and you can't make the voice clearer?") and that the mass murder of September 11th in New York and Washington could easily have been the work of Israeli intelligence agents. Less obvious was his rationale for killing Israeli children.

"You must understand," al-Zahar said, "that no one in Israel who reaches eighteen can bypass the Army, unless he is crippled, and he will serve at least two or three years as a soldier in the occupation. One-third will remain soldiers and the rest will be in the reserves. This is a country of six million people, and it can mobilize a million in twenty-four to forty-eight hours! Also, all the settlers can be considered military.

"Look," he continued. "Nobody enjoys killing children. Nobody. But we cannot forget the blood of our children. And, remember, as the Koran makes clear, an eye for an eye."

In Israel, December had begun with suicide bombings at the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall, in downtown Jerusalem. The next day, a bomber detonated himself aboard a bus in Haifa. In all, twenty-six Israelis were killed. These were hardly the first terror attacks of the season: since late October, there had been, among other incidents, shootings in Hadera and a suicide bombing on the Nazareth-to-Tel Aviv bus. After the murders in Jerusalem and Haifa, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared war and threatened not only to eliminate Hamas and Islamic Jihad but also to undermine the Palestinian Authority, whose armed supporters had been involved in some of the attacks. By mid-December, Israeli tanks and armored personnel carriers had rolled into cities throughout Gaza and the West Bank; there were frequent gun battles and arrests; F-16s and helicopter gunships had fired on numerous targets, including the Gaza airport, Arafat's helicopters, and Palestinian security outposts all over the territories. Arafat, who had wanted to visit Oslo for a reunion of Nobel Prize winners, could barely leave his compound in Ramallah. There were intermittent marches and riots in the territories and threats of more "major events" being planned in terrorist outposts and bomb laboratories in the West Bank cities of Jenin and Nablus. At the same time, the Israelis said that they would continue their policy of "targeted" assassinations of known Palestinian terrorists, and would continue to build more settlements in the occupied territories.

Tactically, it was clear that Sharon wanted to destroy Hamas and weaken Arafat. Less clear was his longer-term strategy. And what made the picture even more complicated was the fact that the most prominent member of his Cabinet, Shimon Peres, is his ideological opposite.

Most nights on Israeli television, after the reports of violence, there is the political news and the tableau of two aging men at the Cabinet table. To the right (literally and politically) is the Prime Minister, a great lump of a man, a bluff Negev farmer and retired general who is known to his admirers as a commander in every Israeli-Arab war since 1948 and to his detractors as a brutal adventurer in Israel's war against the P.L.O. in Lebanon twenty years ago ("the butcher of Beirut"). To the left is the Foreign Minister, Peres, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, regal and vain, who wears fine suits and speaks with a Polish accent.

Peres, who negotiated the Oslo peace accords with the Palestinians, is the Labor Party linchpin in Sharon's Likud-led unity government. Their partnership—to say nothing of their friendship—has been a curiosity from the start, as discordant as George McGovern signing on as Richard Nixon's Secretary of State; and now, at an utterly despondent moment, their relationship is an obsession of the Israeli papers. Sharon has always hated Arafat; as a soldier, he tried to kill him many times. But while Sharon wages his military campaign against the various Palestinian armed groups, Peres, who shared his Nobel with Arafat, carries on secret talks with Arafat's deputies and worries that his side has not done enough to sustain Arafat's "sense of prestige."

Sharon's motives for dancing this tango with Peres are fairly simple. On the right, Benjamin Netanyahu has greater support in the Likud Party, and Sharon, in order to govern from the center, or seem to, feels he needs Peres, the iconic dove. What Peres seeks is less obvious. Neither discretion nor charity is a feature of Israeli political life, and it is nearly impossible to find anyone prepared to think kindly of Peres and his motives. The rare sympathetic view comes dressed as pity. One old friend and liberal ally in the Knesset, Colette Avital, told me, "Shimon is a tragic figure. He is ending his brilliant career with everything he has worked for in collapse. And now? Now he thinks he can manipulate everyone. He can't let go."

Those on the right view Peres as hopelessly, even dangerously, naïve; he is the initiator of an agreement, they say, that threatened the very existence of the state. While Sharon is always quick to compliment Peres and feed his hungry ego, the other right-wingers in the Cabinet have little patience for him. Uzi Landau, Sharon's Public Security Minister, told me with ill-concealed disgust that Peres "constantly" counsels restraint after terrorist attacks. Landau cannot understand why Sharon does not pursue Palestinian terrorists with the same "overwhelming force" with which the Bush Administration has prosecuted the war in Afghanistan. "But what can I do?" Landau said, throwing up his hands.

The resentment among liberals is no less intense. Yossi Beilin, who was a key player during the Oslo talks, is one of Peres's closest friends, but now Beilin says that his old mentor has brought the "mark of Cain" on himself. "Sharon feels immune with Peres there," Beilin told me. "Without him, Sharon would have to face the U.S., Europe, and the Arab world. Everyone knows who Sharon is. This is somebody who has opposed every peace process, including with Egypt and Jordan. He refuses to shake Arafat's hand. He was forced out as Defense Minister by the government in 1983 after the massacres at Sabra and Shatila"—when Israeli forces stood by as their allies the Christian Phalangists stormed into two camps and killed hundreds of Palestinians. "To do what he is

THE SECRET DOCTRINE

Psst, psst, psst,
Is what the snow is saying
To the quiet woods,
With the night falling.

Something pressing,
That can't wait,
On a path that went nowhere,
Where I found myself

Overtaken by heavy flakes
With so much to confide.
The bare twigs pricked their ears—
Great God!

What did they say?
What did they say?
I then went badgering
Every tree and bush.

—*Charles Simic*

doing now he needs a rabbi to make it all kosher," Beilin said. "In Shimon Peres, he got the most kosher rabbi in the world."

I met Peres at his Tel Aviv office on a sunny December morning. He was riffling through the pages of the latest Osama bin Laden biography.

"Have you heard much about it?" he said, extending his hand. "I don't know, I find it a little sensationalistic."

Peres had already had his morning briefings and had spoken with the Prime Minister. At one point, I began to recount for him the comments of the many people I'd talked to, and he cut me off by closing his eyes and nodding.

"Look, I stay because maybe I have a hope, maybe an illusion, that I can influence Sharon," he said. "I feel, maybe wrongly, that Sharon is interested in keeping me in the government because he needs me. What is the price? That people criticize me? Ach." He waved his hand. "I'm working honestly," he said. "So what if I lose some popularity? You can't take popularity to your grave."

Peres is seventy-eight, though he looks no older than he did when he, Arafat, and Yitzhak Rabin sealed the Oslo peace accords on the White House lawn and ushered in what seemed to be the first period of promise in the region since Anwar Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in 1977. But Oslo is dead. Peres's vision of a "New Middle East"—a transformed world in which Israel would trade with a democratic Syria and join the Arab League—has proved so chimerical that it is never mentioned anymore except as a way to mock him. Beginning, perhaps, with the assassination of Rabin, in 1995, by a right-wing Israeli extremist, violence, division, and uncertainty seem to have corroded the national spirit. The economy, which had been booming, is in sharp decline. Twenty-three thousand businesses closed in 2001; thirty-five thousand more closings are expected in the first six months of 2002. There are no tourists. The hotels are dark. My hotel in Jerusalem was so empty that it resembled Jack Nicholson's echoing mountain lair in "The Shining." Far worse, political talk has taken on an ominous tone: not only is the Palestinian question more complicated than ever but among intelligence analysts and military planners there is alarm about a wider, regional conflict. Well before the shock of September 11th, the trends were evident: the increasingly anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli tone of the government press in Egypt; the accelerated development of weapons of mass destruction in Iran and Iraq; the instability of the regimes in Riyadh, Cairo, and Amman.

And yet for his latest American visitor Peres put on a bright face, his New Middle East face. It was not long before he began to talk as if it were the early nineties again. He leaned back in his chair, his Nobel certificate displayed behind him, and set off to discuss, in his peculiar aphoristic style, globalization and the need for an open society, women's liberation and China's liberalization. Peres is the most bookish of Israeli politicians—he consumes biographies, political science, and fiction; his closest and most loyal friend outside politics is the novelist Amos Oz—and yet he is bookish in a perennially undergraduate sort of way, full of enthusiasms. He seemed relieved to leave aside the daily concerns of casualties and green lines, proposal and rejection. As he talked, he appeared happy or masked or both, and I interrupted him to ask how he could sustain such a buoyant mood.

"My mood?" he said. "My mood?" The smile he'd worn since greeting me sagged and then disappeared. "My mood doesn't have to represent the situation. I am usually a self-controlled person. Don't expect me to open up all my buttons and show you how much hair I have on my chest. I am explaining to you how I think, not how I feel."

"How do you feel?"

"I feel terrible! I feel like the ships are in a terrible storm."

"When is the last time you felt this way?"

"On several occasions," Peres said. "There was the terrible wave of terror in 1996, when I was Prime Minister. I went to the square and saw the stones covered with blood, ambulances, and thousands of people surrounding me shouting 'Traitor!' 'Killer!' You think this was a happy moment in my life? The next day, I went to Tel Aviv. It was the same thing. The third day, in Jerusalem, the same reaction. These are awful moments. I don't wish anyone to live through that. There were thousands of people who really felt that way. And on many occasions I was called these things and threatened. But, no matter what others will say, I am not afraid to die, I'm not afraid to be unpopular. As long as I am around, I'd like to be honest with myself, I would like to come home and tell myself that I didn't falsify, I didn't put on a false face. Clearly, I see these funerals, I see a family that lost three of its members. It's not an easy feeling. But it doesn't change the need to decide what to do."

Peres insisted that he did have limits. "If I shall see that I do not have an alternative, then I shall go," he said. "But to work out an alternative I need a lot of patience. And I need to swallow many criticisms. But I could care less. I am not depressed. I am never depressed."

It is hard to name any active politician in the world with a longer and richer experience in public life than Shimon Peres. He has held every high office imaginable: Defense Minister, Foreign Minister, Finance Minister, Prime Minister. Between 1984 and 1986, he proved to be one of the most skillful leaders the country has ever had, solving triple-digit inflation and extricating Israel from its disastrous incursion into Lebanon. And yet every time he has faced the country as a candidate for Prime Minister—five times between 1977 and 1996—he has failed to win. (He has held the office only through a unity-government arrangement with Yitzhak Shamir in the mid-eighties and through tragedy, with Rabin's death.) The explanations for his losses have been the political talk of Israel for decades: he is somehow inauthentic, too formal, not a "real Israeli." He never served as a combat soldier. He speaks with an accent even though he immigrated sixty-eight years ago. He is a Francophile, a dandy, a dreamer. He is an opportunist, he changes positions. He is "soft on the Arabs," too close to the Americans, better on CNN than in the pages of *Ha'aretz*. He is, in the words of Yitzhak Rabin, an "inveterate schemer."

In the spring of 1997, a year after he lost a twenty-point lead in the polls, and the premiership, to Netanyahu, Peres faced a convention of the Labor Party. He has always had a maddeningly righteous view of his defeats—"I have lost elections, but never a campaign"—and at the convention he intended to gloss over his weak showing and hold on to his role as Party leader. He recited his many achievements over the years and then asked, "So, they say I'm a loser! Am I a loser?"

"Yes!" came the answer.

Peres was born in Vishneva, Poland, in 1923. (The family name was originally Persky.) His father, a well-to-do merchant, left for Palestine in 1932, and the rest of the family joined him two years later. Peres attended school in Tel Aviv, where he began to hear of the great Labor Zionist leaders Berl Katznelson and David Ben-Gurion, and, rather than pursue his studies, he left after ninth grade and went on to help build a kibbutz overlooking the Sea of Galilee. When he was a teen-ager, Peres met the woman who would become his wife, Sonia Gelman, and he courted her by reading aloud passages from "Das Kapital." Before he was twenty, he started working as a youth organizer for Ben-Gurion. Nahum Barnea, whose column in the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* is the most widely read in Israel, told me that, while other fledgling Zionist leaders like Rabin and Moshe Dayan were maturing as combat soldiers, Peres was sent into action as a Party apparatchik. "The others were on the battlefield, and Peres was persuading young people to leave the more Marxist faction of the youth movement and be loyal to Ben-Gurion," Barnea said. In 1942, when the Nazis threatened to invade Palestine and destroy the Jewish population, Peres and a few dozen other youth leaders climbed Masada—the desert fortress where, in the first century, Jews committed suicide rather than submit to the Roman invaders—and there recited the enduring Zionist oath "Masada shall not fall again."

Peres's autobiography, "Battling for Peace" (1995), ends with his negotiations in Oslo and his almost mystical vision of a pacific Middle East, but the early chapters portray an ambitious young hawk who travelled the world for Israel's nascent defense forces in search of missiles, tanks, and fighter planes. At the age of twenty-eight, Peres, as director general of the Defense Ministry under Ben-Gurion, went on a string of successful shopping expeditions abroad, especially in France. (The defense relationship with Washington did not begin until the sixties.) Undoubtedly, Peres's singular early achievement was to overcome the objections of Dayan and Golda Meir and push Ben-Gurion to build a nuclear reactor near the Negev town of Dimona. The Dimona project, carried out with French help, brought nuclear deterrence to a tiny and relatively poor country surrounded by hostile states.

Despite his early successes, Peres's rivals and peers began to see him as slick and untrustworthy. Avishai Margalit, a scholar and a well-known writer on Israeli politics, told me that Rabin and Peres were once invited to visit the Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta in Nairobi: "On the way, they stopped in France, and Peres told Rabin how awful it was that he could not find a copy of Kenyatta's autobiography. He was in despair. Finally, when they got to Kenya and they ap-

"Got any plans for later?"

proached Kenyatta, Peres said, 'Mr. President, I was so touched by your autobiography. Especially the chapter about your childhood in the village. It moved me to tears.' Kenyatta was so happy, because the book had not been especially well received. After the meeting, Rabin said with admiration and disgust, 'When did you read it?' 'I didn't,' Peres answered. 'So how did you know about his childhood in the village?' Peres said, 'I didn't. But what else can he write about besides his life in the village?' " In his memoir, Peres admits that as a young politician he was "seen as dangerously ambitious."

No one showed more contempt for Peres than his fellow peace-prize winner Rabin. In Israel's almost unbearably intimate political culture, the two men struggled for the leadership of the Labor Party, and the country, for nearly thirty years, and yet could not escape working together. In 1974, after the Israelis had suffered the shock and losses of the Yom Kippur War and Golda Meir stepped down, Rabin took over as Prime Minister and, "albeit with a heavy heart," appointed Peres Defense Minister. Peres helped rebuild the armed forces and campaigned strongly in the Cabinet for a program to create Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. "Settlements everywhere" was his slogan. Although Rabin and Peres had their differences over policy, their animosity more often had to do with intrigues, power, and a general lack of trust. In his memoirs, Rabin described Peres as "constantly and tirelessly attempting political subversion. . . . He not only tried to undermine me but the entire government, trusting in the old Bolshevik maxim that 'the worse the situation, the better for Peres.' "

Even by the mid-nineties, with Rabin again Prime Minister and Peres Foreign Minister, the two men sometimes could resolve their differences only by employing a mediator—a trade-union lawyer named Giora Eini. On the morning of September 11, 1993, two days before the Oslo accords were to be signed in Washington, Peres, as the chief Israeli negotiator, thought that he was going to represent his country. Rabin had been in no hurry to go. Bill Clinton, however, wanted as high-level a group as possible and persuaded Rabin to come. That day, two reporters from *Yediot Ahronot*, Barnea and Shimon Shiffer, visited Peres at his official residence in Jerusalem. Peres had just heard on the radio that Rabin would lead the delegation. He was furious. "Why didn't he have the decency to call and tell me?" he said. He took a telephone call and asked the two journalists to step outside for a moment. "But we had a new voice-activated tape recorder and I didn't remember to turn it off properly," Barnea recalled, laughing. With the reporters out of the room, Peres referred to Rabin as "the man who has ruined my life" and said that he was going to stay home or resign from the government, or both. It was only that afternoon, when Rabin came from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to pacify Peres, that the crisis passed.

Not just Rabin but Golda Meir, Yitzhak Shamir, and Ehud Barak disliked Peres, even as they worked with him; only Sharon, the most vivid of his ideological opponents but a colleague since the Ben-Gurion days, knows how to woo him. Sharon lets Peres carry on limited negotiations with the P.L.O., although he is likely to end up crushing those talks. Ari Shavit, a leading writer for *Ha'aretz*, the most serious of the Israeli papers, says, "Sharon understands Peres's need for love and affection. They are like an old married couple and, after they fall out, Sharon calls the old girl and they have a candlelight supper and he speaks sweetly and everything is O.K. At seventy-eight, Peres is finally being courted and loved. Sharon sends him flowers."

Shimon Peres was laughing. "All this stuff, that I don't seem Israeli or that I am too eloquent. Please! If I've changed my policies, it's because the situation has changed. I was a hawk, but when we could make peace I was a dove. I've never wanted to be the governor of the Palestinian people." We spoke for half the day, first in his office, then in the back seat of his car—an official white Volvo—and then over lunch, calamari and a bottle of wine, at Raphael, a chic new restaurant overlooking the sea that Peres had been interested in trying.

It is hard to overestimate the sharpness of Peres's ideological turn and the way it affected Israeli history. When the Begin government took power, in 1977, Peres led the Labor opposition and became the Party's representative to the Socialist International. He began spending more time with European leftists: Bruno Kreisky, of Austria; Willy Brandt, of West Germany; Olaf Palme, of Sweden. In the following years, with the Lebanon war in the headlines, Peres began to agree, in large measure, with those leaders' condemnation of Israeli overreach. He had also witnessed on frequent trips to the United States the influence of the antiwar movement. "Shimon could see that this was no longer the Churchill-de Gaulle world he'd grown up in, and the kind of patriotism which he had regarded as the ultimate value was losing its exclusivity as a value of the West," Amos Oz said, at his spartan home in the desert city of Arad. "He became more aware of the validity of the Palestinian claim. The idea that we were the good guys repelling a flood of cruel, bloodthirsty enemies—an archetype of the Zionist mythology—became more complicated. Not to say that he lost his Zionist zeal or became 'pro-Palestinian,' but the simplifications gave ground."

By the time Peres was back in power, in 1992, as Foreign Minister, and his aides had started to meet secretly with Arafat's lieutenants Abu Ala and Abu Mazen, Peres had thoroughly changed his views about the Palestinian question. So, in fact, had many other Israelis. Israelis increasingly began to feel that they should no longer occupy the territories: the moral and demographic price was awful, the terror and the economic drain intolerable; more and more young people were going into the Army not to defend against hostile armies but to guard settlers and prisons, to work at checkpoints. For Peres, the time had come for progress toward a two-state solution. Oslo was his leap of faith.

The leap was enormous. After having devoted his public life to the clash with the Palestinians and the Arab states, Peres could write serenely that this world of perpetual conflict "no longer exists": "We are ending a decades-long history dominated by war and embarking on an era in which the guns will stay silent while dreams flourish." His dream was of a New Middle East that no longer required an emphasis on vigorous security arrangements; instead, he envisaged a level of economic development and integration like that of the new Europe. Even in the euphoria of 1993, when it was published, his book "The New Middle East" seemed to have outpaced political reality: "At the threshold of the twenty-first century, we do not need to reinforce sovereignty, but rather to strengthen the position of humankind."

Eight years after the signing of the accords, Peres still clings to the "spirit of Oslo." In this he is extremely lonely. Many Israelis soon argued that Arafat did not necessarily intend to renounce and suppress terror, or even to acknowledge the legitimacy of Israel. In May, 1994, at a mosque in Johannesburg, he gave a speech in which he hinted to his audience that Oslo should be regarded as merely tactical, that it was like the truce of Hudaibiya, in the seventh century, when the Muslims made a pact with the Quraysh tribe but then broke the peace to seize Mecca. In 1996, after reining in terror for a few years, Arafat seemed to unleash it, so much so that Peres suddenly looked paralyzed, and he lost to Netanyahu. Even the most optimistic and dovish Israelis began to think that Arafat was interested not in a two-state compromise but, rather, in a condition of permanent conflict. Four years later, the next Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, made a series of dramatic proposals to Arafat, beginning at Camp David. He offered virtually all of the West Bank and Gaza, a divided Jerusalem, and a significant rollback in the Jewish settlements. The key Palestinian demand that Barak did not satisfy was the "right of return" to all Palestinian refugees since 1948. Arafat refused the proposals, and at the end of last September, after Ariel Sharon took his notoriously provocative stroll on the Temple Mount near the al-Aqsa mosque, the second intifada began. Since then, a thousand people have died in the violence, three-quarters of them Palestinians.

And still Peres counts himself an optimist. I asked him if he felt that Arafat had betrayed him in the years since Oslo.

"Yes, but also surprised, not only betrayed," he said brightly. "He did things that no other Palestinian leader would do. He went to Oslo, he said he would stop terror. In 1995, when I replaced Rabin and terror started and terror made me lose the elections, Arafat went in very strongly to stop Hamas, and he stopped it. Then Netanyahu took credit for that. History is full of laughs. What can I do?"

Israeli intelligence and military analysts disagree on the degree to which Arafat can control the violence among the Palestinian groups. So do Sharon and Peres. Peres said, "The Prime Minister probably thinks that Arafat is in charge of all the terror. I am not convinced. I think he is in charge of preventing it, but when it comes to producing terror the greatest problem the Palestinians have is that they have dissident armed groups. And what's happening is that Hamas is making these bombs and Arafat is being punished. Hamas does not take orders from Arafat. Our complaint against Arafat is that he doesn't give orders. I have told him that many times, and he told me that in the Israeli Cabinet there are many views. And I said yes, we have many views, but we have one gun; you may have one view, but you have ten guns, each of them shooting in a different direction.

"Sharon says you shouldn't negotiate under fire. I doubt the wisdom of that, because Hamas is the one deciding that we shouldn't negotiate. They send one suicide bomber, and that's it."

Because of a long history of public and military hatred, Sharon can hardly deal with Arafat directly himself. Instead, he has called on Peres for public and semi-public talks and on his son, Omri Sharon, to pass messages privately.

"Sharon hates the guts of Arafat," Peres said. "He doesn't make any secret of it. He won't shake Arafat's hand. So now he feels his justification. He's won the struggle. He's got the support of the United States and Europe. He feels like a winner. Me, I don't think there is any win except peace. Nothing else is important."

Some Palestinian leaders who have had dealings with Peres in the past are bewildered by his partnership with Sharon. Saeb Erekat, who helped negotiate Oslo from the Palestinian side, told me, "Sometimes I know what Shimon is doing, sometimes I don't. I've known him for many years, and he's done a lot for peace. Deep in his heart, he wants this peace process to succeed more than anyone else. But what is he doing with a man like Sharon? Sharon lives his life to do anything he can to put obstacles in the way of peace, through settlements, through attacks, through subjugation. Shimon may think that he has a gun with one bullet—the bullet being his threat to leave the unity government—and he thinks, When should I use this bullet? But I wonder if, under the current circumstances, he really has this bullet."

Toward the end of Ramadan, I went with a couple of other reporters to visit Ramallah, the P.L.O.'s West Bank headquarters. On the way toward the center of town, we stopped at a building that had been rocketed by an Israeli helicopter. It was the police station where, a year ago, two Israelis were lynched. On the wall is a spray-painted slogan in English ("A Settler a Day Keeps the Doctor Away") and two red handprints—a kind of tribute to the way the men who lynched the two Israelis then soaked their hands in the victims' blood. Next door to the station, the directors of a Quaker school for Palestinian children showed us the ruins of three classrooms that had been blasted by Israeli rockets when they overshot the police station.

Thousands of people were out on the streets shopping for the feast of Eid al-Fitr. While waiting to meet a Fatah leader, we decided to stop a few people and ask about the situation in town: there were Israeli tanks down the road, near the apartment of one of Arafat's top lieutenants, Marwan Barghouti. The first person we stopped was a man in his late forties named Neu'man Mahmoud, who worked as a building inspector. He said that his wife, Ida, had been shot to death last March during a gun battle with Israelis from the neighboring settlement of Psagot. They have three children; two of them are living now with relatives in Minnesota.

"They left after their mother was martyred," Mahmoud said. "But I want them to come back." He did not seem at all convinced that they would or should.

A little while later, we arranged to meet at a restaurant with Hussam Shaheen, a wiry man of around thirty who has been arrested at least twenty times by the Israelis for his role in the first intifada. Shaheen made jokes about sitting too close to the window or accepting any new cell phones "as presents." He lived in Jerusalem until late last year; he assumes that he is wanted by the Israeli police, and so he remains in Ramallah, "moving around."

Shaheen knows people in Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and he said he can "understand the pressures" that lead young Palestinians to blow themselves up on crowded buses. But he said, "The intifada is a fight for peace, not against peace. We are not fighting to destroy the Israelis. There is no other alternative for us after Oslo." The Islamist groups, he said, may have emotional support—they are certainly gaining popularity in the schools and universities—but he insisted that there was no pretender to Arafat's leadership. "The Palestinian street, under ordinary circumstances, is not a religious street," he said. "But in an emotional situation they think Hamas is responding to what the Israelis do."

In a televised speech on December 16th, Arafat replied to Sharon's demands and agreed to pursue the terrorists in his own camp. In both rhetoric and intent, however, he seemed at least as concerned by Hamas's challenge to his authority as by the Israeli pressure. On the twenty-first, after the clashes between rock-throwing Hamas youths and Palestinian police in Gaza ended, with six dead, Arafat's men and the representatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad called a truce and a temporary halt to all military operations in Israel.

And yet it was hard to imagine that Hamas would be quiet for long. "The last week was a dramatic week in Palestinian history," Mahmoud al-Zahar, the Hamas spokesman, told me the day the truce agreement was announced. "The Palestinian Authority and Arafat shifted their attitude from sharing in the intifada to coöperating with the Israelis against their own people." He said that Hamas had agreed "temporarily" to stop all "martyr operations" inside Israel, but he said it with a wry smile and the acknowledgment that "it's all tactical."

Al-Zahar said, "If Sharon continues to kill, if he expands the settlements, and wastes our time, we'll resume our activities."

"I'm sorry, Mother, we don't respond to telephone solicitations."

In our conversations, Peres was hardly the airy pacifist portrayed by his enemies. He said that reports of reform in Iran were wildly overstated and expressed support for an American assault on Iraq to eliminate Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, even if that meant Iraq would attack Israel. ("If you drop one of those fifteen-thousand-pound bombs on his Presidential palaces, the effect will be similar to what you've had in Afghanistan.")

Peres hinted that he had been working on a secret, interim offer to the Palestinians that would not be a final pact but could, after so many months of hostility and killing, re-start negotiations. His plan was to have Israel recognize a kind of Palestinian mini-state comprising most of Gaza and about half of the West Bank; the two sides would then resume talks on further territorial concessions, including an agreement on the status of Jerusalem. Unlike Barak, who tried to slice the Gordian knot all at once, Peres felt that neither side was capable of anything more than a slow accumulation of trust.

"If we shall again try to do the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees right away, we'll fail," he said. "The gradualism can start by giving the Palestinians a state where they are. Then continue our negotiations, state to state. Leave the settlements for the next stage. I don't want to have an assembly of all the opposing winds, because then nothing will sail. In politics, as in family life, be careful not to win too much, because you may win the point and lose the game."

In the December 23rd edition of *Yediot Ahronot*, Nahum Barnea broke the story that Peres had been trying to work out such a deal with one of Arafat's deputies, Abu Ala, who was Peres's old Oslo negotiating partner. Although Barnea told me that Sharon surely knew that the talks were going on, the Prime Minister affected outrage, saying that the proposal "causes serious damage to Israel."

There were cries of betrayal on the right. But, once more, Peres remained. I remembered what he had told me before we parted. "Yes, there are differences between me and Sharon, but there is Arafat, and handling him is like handling an eel," he said. "But, finally, you can fish eels, too, if you have patience. And I have the patience."

In the days before Christmas Eve, Arafat announced his intention to go to Bethlehem to celebrate Mass with the Palestinian Christians there. Sharon said that Arafat could not leave Ramallah unless he arrested the men who had murdered Rehavam Ze'evi, the Minister of Tourism, last October. Peres protested, saying of Arafat, "Let him go, pray, do what he wants." Sharon refused. Arafat stayed in Ramallah. On Christmas Eve, a gunman shot an Israeli settler near the city of Nablus. The al-Aqsa Brigades, a militia loyal to Yasir Arafat, claimed responsibility. ♦

FICTION

JAMAICA

BY DAVID SCHICKLER

My name is Everett Dose, and once a month my wife, Jillian, hosts a meeting of the Gorgon Book Club in our living room. The Gorgons are six women. Two, Luce Winningham and Gwen Kirkle, are divorcées. One, Dorry Smith, is a semi-professional archer. My wife, Jillian, is the fourth Gorgon, and the fifth is our daughter, Theresa, who lives with her boyfriend and has a severely pierced face. I have mentioned to Jillian several times that the mythological Gorgons were only three in number and petrifyingly ugly, and that the book club is therefore misnamed, especially considering Luce Winningham's fetching Peter Pan haircut and her perky disdain for brassieres. When I offer such commentary, Jillian reminds me that N.F.L. football is a brutal mystery to her and tells me to take out the garbage.

I'm forty-four now, and I've built a decent life for Jillian and myself and our two children. (My son, Thomas, is twelve, blind, and polite.) For eighteen years, I've edited news for a local television network, WAOK, here in Chicago. If the mayor complains about graft, the White Sox, and Internet porn, I trim which footage gets aired (the porn). If a guy on a ledge blathers his unhinged woes, I consider his case, and do or do not grant him a continuance. I mix in occasional shots of newborn pandas or of glasnost, but I'm usually editing plight. Last week, on Route 94, a Skokie man in a Datsun hit a twelve-point buck, cutting its legs clean off. The poor chump (the man, I mean) ended up at the morgue with antlers up his nose, and I had to air still shots of a deer torso shoved through a windshield.

Still, grim as my calling can be, I make enough money to shield my family from most of the traumas I dice and chop at AOK. Our house has an antique staircase, and Jillian knits pleasant, pastel-colored sweaters for Thomas and our dachshund, T.J. Yes, disorder can creep in: we have mice in our basement and walls. In response, however, my son and I are training T.J. to hunt the little vermin. It's a difficult process involving an alarm whistle and the Pavlovian encouragement of dog biscuits, but some night soon my dachshund will race to Jillian's feet and drop from his jaws a mouse with a snapped neck, and my mastery of this household will be publicly confirmed.

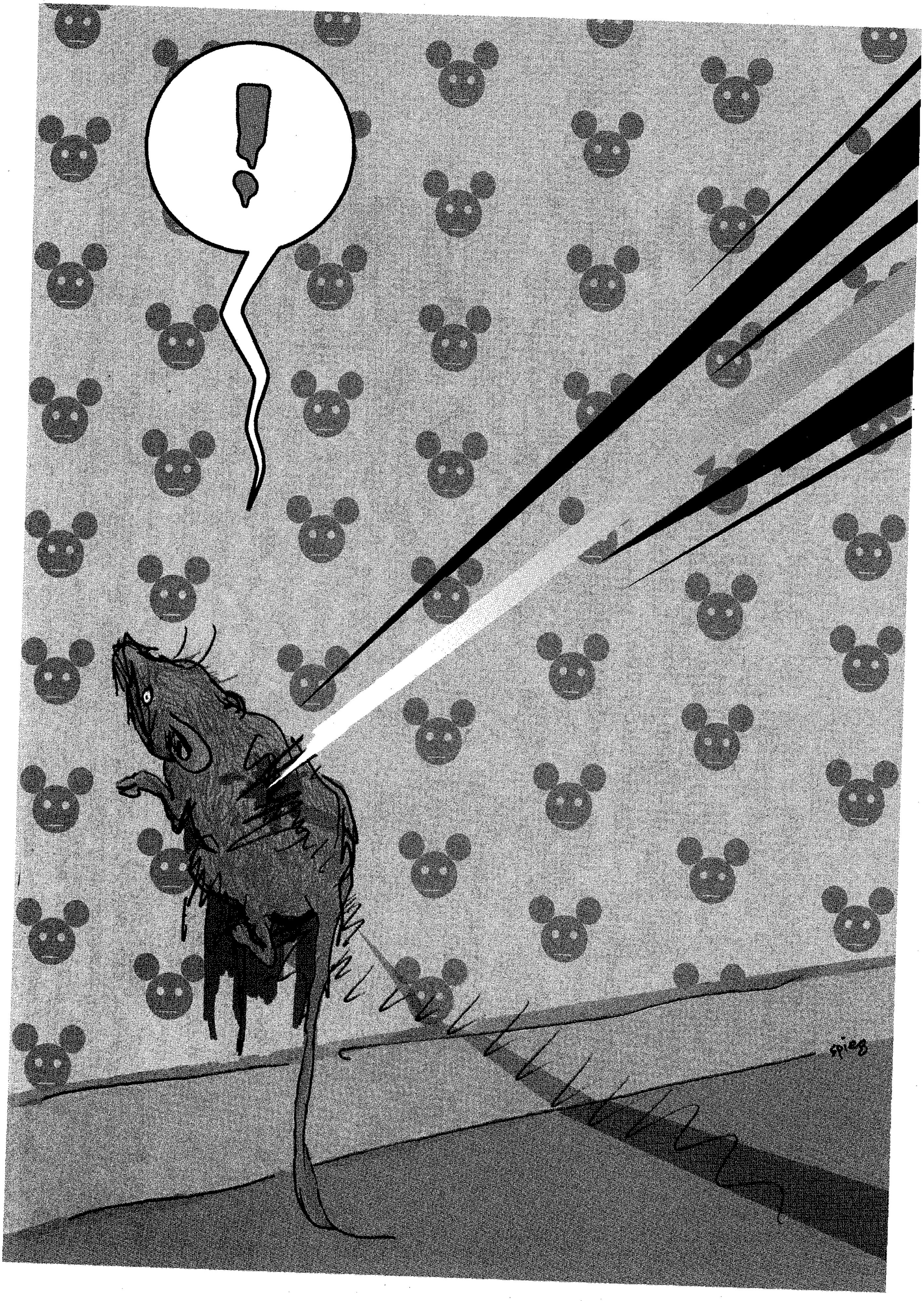
As for the Gorgons, it surprises me not at all that they hold their powwows in my living room, because it's a damn fine living room. Currently, it's decorated for Christmas. There's a brick hearth with frosted holly on the mantel, and a ten-foot-high tree that I felled myself. Every year, little blind Thomas trims the tree with no help from anyone: I watch and weep with joy at the life, the home I've created. So what if Jillian banishes me to my upstairs den on Gorgon nights? I'm more comfortable there anyway, especially because of the sixth and final Gorgon, Abigail Van Roost.

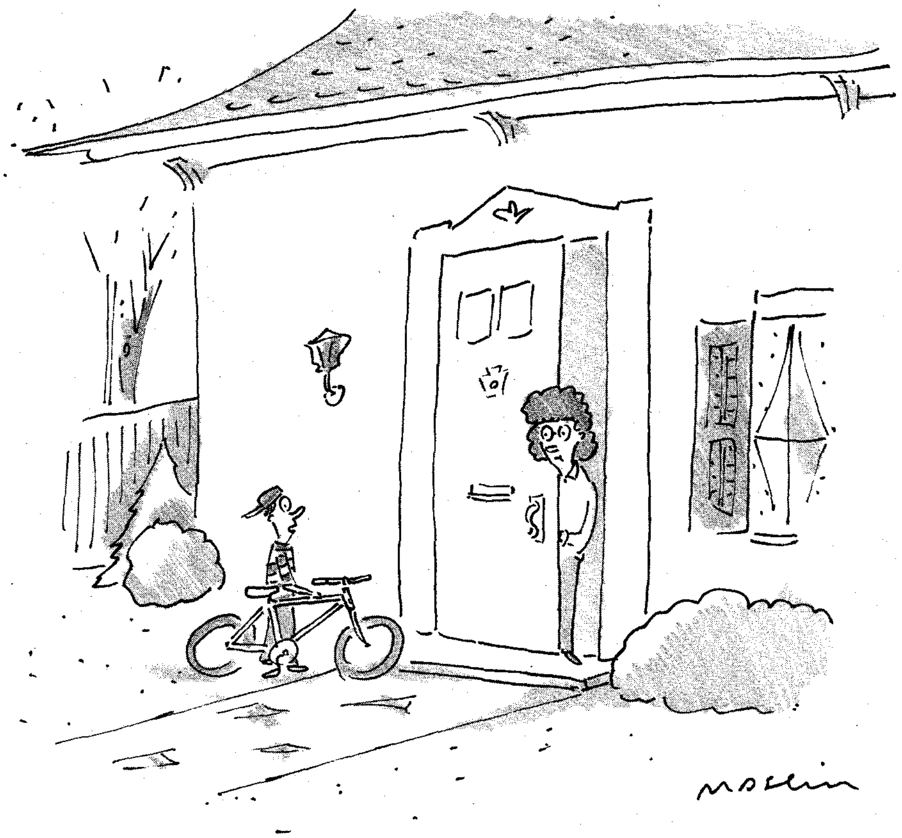
Abigail, Jillian, and I attended the same high school in Cicero. Abby and Jillian were friends, and in junior year Abby and I, as track-and-field teammates, fell in love. Abby was a hurdler, I was a pole-vaulter, and each day after practice we walked down to the Nathan Gandy Apothecary, where I bought Heath bars for Abby and fucked her behind the Dumpster. Those were high old times, but they ended tragically our senior year. Abby's father, Jared, managed a down-in-the-mouth chicken-packing warehouse, and on snowy winter afternoons Abby often set up her hurdles in the warehouse and practiced her sprints there. One day, in mid-workout, Abby skidded out and somehow got herself run over by a forklift. Her legs were crushed completely and her face got, well, mangled, and she's been in a wheelchair ever since. Jared Van Roost closed his already faltering business, I (out of cowardice) split with Abby and took up with Jillian, and now most Chicagoans are patrons of Cheeper Chicken, a Toronto-based poultry outfit that has made disturbingly strong inroads into the American heartland. Anyway, the silver lining (which it's sometimes my job to find) is that Abby married Dr. Bob Beach, a wealthy dermatologist, and now when Dr. Bob drops Abby by for Gorgon nights both her skin and her demeanor positively glow. She apparently bears no ill will toward me or Jillian, but I still find myself ashamed whenever I see her. My boy Thomas, on the other hand, is Abby's bosom buddy. He loves to sit cross-legged beside Abby's wheelchair, and the Gorgons always choose books that are available in Braille or on audiotape so that my little man can keep up.

It's eight o'clock right now, and I'm sitting in my den, where I've just finished reading "Meet Your Maker," the best-selling potboiler that the Gorgons will discuss at eight-thirty. "Meet Your Maker" is the latest novel by the Chicago native Joseph Hederal recounting the adventures of Detective Wesley Truth, a broad-shouldered Buddhist gumshoe who meditates his way around the Windy City, solving homicides and bedding housewives. When I tell Jillian that it makes no sense for a Buddhist to carry nunchakus, Jillian tells me that Wesley Truth is a dark, complex man and that Eastern religions are full of surprises.

I step out of my den and descend a third of the way downstairs. I sit on the stairs and gaze down through the banisters. Jillian's in the kitchen, breaking out almond cookies and brandy and icing her famous Chocolate Chaos cake. She has already set around the coffee table the giant throw pillows on which the Gorgons will recline. In his basket

ART SPIEGELMAN


!
spieg



"Oh, O.K. Well, when your family's all through hunkering down, then can Timmy come out and play?"

• •

near the roaring hearth, T.J. the dachshund stretches and yawns. Beneath the glittering tree, among wrapped Christmas gifts, sits Thomas, facing the door, waiting for Abby. I try to ignore the fact that T.J. and Thomas are wearing matching sweaters that feature hyper-enthused elves somersaulting down ice hills. I lean my forehead against two bannisters, wishing to join the warm cheer on the other side of the bars. Staring at all the bounty below, I recall a Latin phrase from my old school days.

"*Hoc feci*," I say softly.

I press my forehead harder against the bannisters, like a child at a windowpane. I made this, I made all that I'm seeing. Light spangles off the tree ornaments. T.J. sighs. Proud tears brim in my eyes.

"*Hoc feci.*" I strain forward even more, whispering my incantation, my credo. Then, quite suddenly, my head pops between the bannisters. "Ouch!"

Thomas cocks his head in several directions. Many blind folk have uncanny senses of smell and hearing, and can determine your position from the slightest movement. Thomas isn't one of those folk.

"Dad?" he says.

"I'm on the stairs, buddy." I pull my head back, but it stays budged. "I'm stuck."

Jillian enters the living room, sets the brandy bottle on the coffee table, and sees me. "Everett," she says, "go away."

"I can't, Jills. I'm stuck. Look." I slide my head down, aligning it with the skinniest parts of the bannisters, and tug myself backward. The bannisters, which are made of the finest Indonesian teak, thump against my skull. They do not release me. "This is the darnedest thing," I say.

Jillian puts her hands on her hips. "Stop playing, Everett. Go upstairs at once."

"I'm not playing. Watch." I wiggle my head. I shuck and jive it back and forth, but no dice. I start laughing.

"You're not amusing me," says my wife.

I loll my wrists over the handrail, and make a long face, like a man in the stocks.

"What's wrong with Dad?" Thomas says.

Jillian stares up at me. "Everett, you know you're not welcome at book club. If you stop clowning and go upstairs this minute, I'll give you a Popsicle later. All right?"

A Popsicle is Jillian's code word for a blow job. It is a rare offer, and an even rarer event.

"Jillian, I'm not kidding. I'm stuck. I got my head in here, and I can't get it out. It's like a Christmas miracle or something."

"I want a Popsicle," Thomas says.

Jillian marches up the stairs. T.J. follows her.

"What you're claiming is against the laws of physics, Everett." Jillian grabs my shoulders and starts yanking me backward, clumping my head against the bannisters. My mouse-alarm whistle, which I wear inside my shirt on a necklace, digs at my clavicle.

"Not really." I cough. "It's like when you push a cork into a wine bottle by mistake, and you can't extract it. Also, what you're doing really hurts."

T.J., who likes to lick my face, starts whining because he can't get at me. Instead, he nibbles my ankle.

"I'm all right, boy," I say. And I am. For some reason, I feel great. It's my staircase, after all.

Jillian keeps tugging. It's not that my wife hates me, by the way. Just last Friday night, I bowled a two-forty-three at Sycamore Lanes, and Jillian congratulated me twice the next day, without any prompting.

"This is one for the books," I say.

"Come on, you," Jillian mutters at my skull. She folds my ears closed, making my head an aerodynamic bullet.

I hear a distant pinging. "Is that the doorbell?"

Jillian lets go of my ears. "Thomas," she grunts, "get the door."

Thomas does, and in walks his sister, Theresa, who is nineteen and sleeping with a thirty-five-year-old truck driver named Huey.

"Hi, sweetheart." I wave to Theresa.

Theresa kisses Thomas on the head. She scowls up at me. "Go away, Everett," she says.

"I believe my name is Dad."

Jillian has fetched some Vaseline and is anointing my entire head. I try to be civil with Theresa.

"How's Huey?" I say. It pains me to ask this, because every time I think of Theresa and her scruffy, lecherous man friend I picture my daughter in a four-way with Huey and two other truckers named Dewey and Louie. It is an unhealthy image.

"How'd you get like that?" demands Theresa.

My wife grabs me by the waist of my pants and hauls hard, placing unwelcome pressure on my testicles.

"Jillian, enough," I say, losing patience.

With a snort, my wife stops. I don't blame her for not wanting me at Gorgon Club. When she joins me for nights out with the guys, calamity strikes. One time two years ago, Jillian accompanied me and my buddies to Sycamore Lanes and proceeded to bowl an eleven. I'm talking eleven points total, for ten frames, with smirking, beer-filled men as witnesses. Nine one-pin frames followed by a final, mighty two-pin frame. That's marriage.

Luce Winningham and the ever platinum-blond Gwen Kirkle walk through the door, which Thomas has left open.

"Health and happiness to all!" announces Gwen, who runs a vitamin shop and supports animal rights. I immediately detect Luce Winningham's perfume.

Jillian leans close to my ear. "You better behave," she whispers.

"Oh. Hi, Everett." Gwen is looking up at me, frowning. She's angry that I televised photos of a legless, windshield-encrusted deer.

Jillian sweeps downstairs, hugs her divorced pals. "Welcome, Gorgons."

"I smell Luce Winningham," Thomas says.

"Good call, son," I say, though we all smell her.

Luce and Gwen stare up at me. Gwen's low neckline is a holiday treat. Despite her pro-kasha diet and my taste for raw-sirloin sandwiches, I've thought often over the years that Gwen and I were on the verge of a torrid affair. Finally, at a cocktail party this past August, Gwen pulled me into a coatroom. I braced myself, expecting Gwen to kiss me and ruin my marriage, but she ended up asking if I realized that garlic and cholesterol are natural enemies.

"What're you doing, Everett?" Luce says.

"You have goop on your head," Gwen says.

I shrug and smile. Swabbed in Vaseline, I feel like a newborn baby.

"I'm caught," I tell the women. I say it loud and I say it proud.

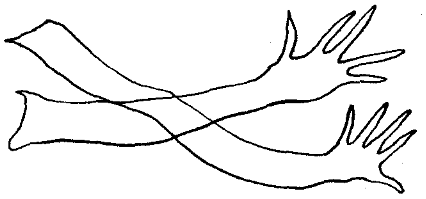
Half an hour later, all the Gorgons have arrived and I'm still stuck. As the women munch almond cookies, they discuss "Meet Your Maker," in which Wesley Truth saves a young, slinky Ugandan woman during a stickup at Lieberman's Deli. The stickup (which is really part of a sinister international conspiracy) becomes a shootout, which claims the life of Mr. Lieberman's beloved canary, Midge. Wesley Truth conks his head on the meat slicer and later comes to in the warehouse loft of the sloe-eyed Ugandan woman, Spella, who's just out of the shower. Wesley remembers nothing except that he's a Buddhist and Spella's a fox. As Spella towels off, she confesses that a Ugandan bounty hunter, Mr. Dropsy, wants her unborn baby for fiendish purposes. Wesley realizes that he must empty himself of selfish desires and kick ass on Spella's behalf.

"Give me a break." I swivel my neck, which is getting stiff. "Real men don't chase Ugandan tail. Real men have wives."

"Please be quiet, Everett," begs Jillian.

"Real men have wives, huh?" Luce glares at me. "Does that mean real women have husbands?" Luce is touchy because her ex-mate, Norbert Wilco, left her last year for a girl in clown college. Luce is thirty-nine and desperate to have babies and now her former husband is screwing someone whose nose will honk when squeezed.

"Let's toast the holidays," says Abby, the matriarchal, peacemaking Gorgon, albeit the thief of my virginity. She sits in her wheelchair, close to the tree, tousling my blind son's hair. Abby's chair appears to be a new, all-chrome gizmo, perhaps an early Christmas gift from plucky Bob Beach, M.D.



"What I'd like to know," I say, "is who names a canary Midge?"

Jillian sighs and rubs her temples.

Abby, undeterred, raises her brandy glass. "To togetherness."

The Gorgons clink glasses. School's out till after New Year, so Luce, a kindergarten teacher, is refilling her glass regularly, and Theresa is on her third amaretto. Dorry Smith sits cross-legged on her throw pillow, abstaining from alcohol and wearing a green tunic. Slung across Dorry's back is a bow and a quiver of arrows. Dorry's husband, an English clothing-store owner named Ben, died ten years ago, and in her grief Dorry became a consummate Anglophile. This began with a taste for tea and tennis, and evolved into a fascination with Robin Hood. The crazy wench now walks the streets of Chicago year-round wearing her weapons in memoriam.

"Everett may have a point," Dorry says. "The canary pushed the envelope. Authors too often introduce a pet to garner unearned sympathy."

T.J. is nosing at my ass, as if I were his fellow-mutt.

Gwen glares at Dorry. "The canary's death was gratuitous, that's all."

The Gorgons are silent. They know never to question Gwen's defense of an animal. Gwen's second husband, Frederick, did not know this, and when he spayed Gwen's cat, Soybean, without her permission Gwen kicked Frederick viciously in the balls and served him papers.

"Let's change tacks and consider Spella," Abby suggests. She wheels herself forward between Dorry and Gwen, and pats each of them affectionately on the wrist. Her chrome hot rod flashes in the hearth light, like the ride of some god, some arbiter.

I clear my throat. "Hey there, Abby. Cool wheels."

Abby ignores me, her eyes on the Gorgons. "Is Spella weak in her reliance on Wesley?"

"A chariot of fire," I say. "Ha."

"Spella is pregnant yet horny," Theresa says. "I respect that."

Luce frowns. Theresa rubs her belly, as if to tell us something.

I decide to get literary. "Wesley Truth's amnesia was absurd. Absurd and hackneyed." I speak loudly, for the women are far from me. "It's not easy for a man to forget who he is."

Jillian sighs. We don't have blistering fights, she and I, but a few months ago she said to me, please, let's try sleeping in separate beds. I said to her, please, let's don't.

Thomas asks what "hackneyed" means.

I say, "It means tired out, son. Tired out from overuse."

Dorry thrusts her chin my way. "You know, I can chop him out of there, Jillian." Dorry adjusts the folds of her tunic to reveal a utility belt. Lo and behold, she's packing a small axe, as well as a sheathed dagger and a cell phone.

"No, leave him be," my wife says. "We'll pretend he's not there."

Abby claps her hands. "I know. Let's all be quiet for two minutes, and everyone think of one word, one totally perfect word, to describe how Wesley Truth made you feel when you read this novel."

The room falls silent. The scents of pine and Luce Winningham are in the air. I've been hunkered in a squat all this time, but now, to stretch my back, I lie on my stomach along one step of the stairs and coax my arms through the bannisters. I prop my head on my hands like a boy before a campfire, and look down on the women. T.J., in his elfin sweater, flops one step below me.

As the women think, I watch Abby as she gazes at the hearth fire. Her jawbones jut at severe, post-accident angles, but she looks perfectly content. If I were editing her profile for AOK, for, say, an inspirational piece about cripples, I would crop the picture so as to feature from above her fine poise in the wheelchair, the arch of her back, the firelight in her hair. In fact, back in my pole-vaulting days, I sought this view of Abby every afternoon as I speared myself fifteen feet into the sky, and Abby stood beside the cushioned pit below, watching me. I would freeze for a snapshot second, at the top of my arc, and gaze down at my girl, her hair a bell on her shoulders, her eyes a clear path to mine. Thinking of those days, and looking at the Gorgons now, I am reminded suddenly of a sunny afternoon on my honeymoon, in Jamaica, when Jillian and I went snorkeling. We investigated a shipwreck. The ship was small, and only about twenty feet underwater, and it had been sunk on purpose by the resort owners so that it could be discovered again and again by people like us. Anyway, at one point Jillian was by the ship and I was up on the surface, getting air. I aimed my mask down to check on my bride, and, as I did, Jillian, three fathoms deep, looked up at me, and just then some sort of translucent, yellow, gelatinous ocean creature swam in between us. This leviathan or what have you glided quickly by, but while it was there I saw straight through its diaphanous body, and beheld a shimmering, glinty version of my wife. She was still Jillian, in a black one-piece, with full breasts and crooked teeth and all the other joys I'd married, but around the edges she had waving squiggles and snakes of golden light shooting out from her hair. This vision soon vanished, but, while it was real, I was overwhelmed, and immobile, and unable to breathe.

"Lonely," Gwen said. "Wesley made me feel lonely. He had three separate lovers this time around."

"He's cruising for an S.T.D.," I snort. "The next book will be 'Cure Your Crabs.'"

My wife points at me. "Ignore that man."

"Adventurous," Luce Winningham says. According to Jillian, Luce used to skinny-dip with Norbert Wilco, the Lothario of clowns.

"Well armed," Dorry says.

"Fat," Jillian sighs. "Spella was, what, a size two?"

"Jealous," Abby says. "I was jealous of Wesley's amnesia. He seemed to have a new lease on life. I mean, he slept with Spella and killed anyone who tried to harm her, and he did it all without feeling guilt or remorse." Abby leans forward. Her left cheekbone, the one that got most squashed by the forklift, contains a hollow that the light from my Christmas-tree bulbs cannot fill. "Imagine living like that," Abby says. "Imagine the possibilities."

Theresa lifts her studded brows. "Sexy."

"I'd be scared stiff," Jillian says. She looks at me almost accusingly as she says this, but she tucks her hair behind her ears, a gesture she knows I like. She made that same move on our first date. We were in the balcony of a movie house, and I was halfway into the yawn-stretch-the-arms-grab-the-girl ploy when Jillian's hand shot up to protect her hair and maybe her heart. I knew then that I would never have Jillian, body and soul, unless I married her. That hair tuck: I couldn't resist it.

"Scared stiff?" says Abby. "Why? You could be anybody you wanted."

"Unless you were blind," Thomas observes.

Another silence. The Gorgons shift about on their cushions. At work, it's my job to splice out moments—unsure pauses—like the one I'm witnessing. I pet T.J. behind the ears, and stare at each Gorgon, trying to read her thoughts. I imagine that Luce is dreaming of a Barnum & Baileyless world, Abby is mourning her legs, and Jillian is sitting on the steps of some church, some building I wish I believed in.

"I'm just glad to see Wesley eating better," Gwen says cheerfully. "Remember two books ago, in 'Pick Your Poison,' he was obsessed with prime rib."

The other women glare at Gwen. She's somehow killed a moment, a contemplative vibe.

"Hey, ladies," I call out. "Everett here, checking in."

Thomas grins. "Hey, Dad."

"Howdy, buddy."

Theresa cuts her eyes at me. "Enough fucking interruptions, Everett."

"Theresa," Jillian says, "don't say 'fuck' to your father."

Theresa folds her arms on her chest. My wife's guests don't move. The firewood spits in an unjolly way.

"Time for Chaos," Jillian says, as brightly as she can. She heads for the kitchen.

I should explain about Theresa. She's a decent person—she works at a home, helping old people die well—but she hates Christmas, and she hates me at Christmastime. It's my fault. Thirteen years ago, when Theresa was six and Jillian was pregnant with Thomas, we found out that Thomas would be born blind. The doctor showed Jillian and me a sonogram, showed us the lumps where Thomas's eyes should have been growing, and it killed me. I wanted to explain it to Theresa, to teach her before Thomas's birth that ours is a broken world, to brace her for forklift accidents and divorces and blindness and all the other awful news I stare at daily. So I wrote Theresa a story called "Tink on the Blink" and read it to her on Christmas Eve. "Tink on the Blink" was a story in which Tinkerbell is having fun in Never Never Land with the Lost Boys when suddenly she develops pancreatic cancer. She ends up in the hospital on life support. The Lost Boys gather round loyally and hold Tink's little hand and clap and sing about how fervently they believe in fairies, but despite the warm love of friends Tinkerbell flatlines, her wings fall off, and she dies. In retrospect, this story may have been a mite harsh for a six-year-old. Theresa freaked out and had nightmares, and we took her to a child psychologist and Jillian would barely speak to me for a month, until Thomas was born and he built some peace between us.

"This cake is divine," gushes Luce.

Dorry licks her fork. "Yes, divine."

Jillian brings me some Chaos. She hands it to me carefully, so as not to wake T.J., who's dozing at my side. I hold my fork in one trapped hand and my plate in the other.

"Thank you," I tell Jillian.

While the Gorgons ingest chocolate, the talk returns (I'm gratified to say) to my question of whether Wesley Truth is a real man.

"Hell yes, he's a real man," Luce says.

"He's both spiritual and primordial," Gwen says.

"He's a fighter," Dorry says.

"But he never breaks so much as a bone," Abby says.

Theresa nudges Luce. "He's got pecs like my Huey."

"Fictional pecs," I say. "Wesley Truth has fictional pecs, and fictional sex. He never faces unmitigated sadness. He never gets abandoned, or . . . or crushed or intimidated or embarrassed or anything. He's *not* a real man. He's bullshit."

"You know what I think, Everett?" Jillian says. "I think if you were a real man you would've debannistered yourself by now. You would've engineered some escape."

I wish I could wink at my son. I wish that just once a week I could lower one eyelid at the only other man in the house, and have that lowered eyelid mean "Uh-oh, Mom's mad."

"Maybe I'm happy like this, Jillian," I joke, patting the bannisters that hold me. "Maybe, even better than Wesley Truth, I can accept whatever bleak fix life puts me in."

"Actually," Luce says, munching a cookie, "that's a really nice staircase."

"It's Indonesian teak," I say.

"Everett." My Gorgon wife's voice is shaking. "Nothing about you is better than Wesley Truth." Something I never would have expected—a tear—drips onto Jillian's cheek. If I could get to Jillian, I'd wipe that tear clear, splice it out. But I'm stuck.

"Hey. Jills. I was just talking. Jills?"

Jillian stares at the fire. Glaring at me, Luce throws an arm around Jillian's shoulder and gives my wife a squeeze. I feel something then that Wesley Truth doesn't feel: I feel remorse.

"I'm sorry, Jills," I say.

"I would never want amnesia," Theresa decides. "I've had such great times with Huey, I want to remember them all."

"There's a mouse," Gwen Kirkle says, casually. She points to the floor under the tree, and, sure enough, there's a mouse killing time among the gifts. Luce Winningham screams.

Jillian leaps to her feet. "Everett, goddammit, you said you'd caught them all."

I spring into action. Given my circumstances, I do this by yanking out my necklace and blowing the whistle. Beside me, T.J. jumps up. So does Thomas. Luce screams again, doubly confused.

Jillian stares at my whistle. "What the Christ is that?"

I ignore my wife, and point out the intruder below. T.J. follows my finger, howls in recognition, races downstairs.

"Wait," pleads Gwen, the canary-lover.

"Kill it," Luce squeals.

"Easy, Gorgons," Jillian says.

Abby grips her wheelchair, ready to roll. The mouse scurries behind the couch, but I'm out to prove myself.

"Get him, T.J.," I yell. "To the woodbox, Thomas."

My son zips to the hearth and plunks himself inside the woodbox, cutting off what I've long suspected is the mice's access from the basement to our living room. Gwen Kirkle is on her feet now, a righteous panic in her eyes. She stands between T.J. and the couch, but the dachshund, still howling, slips between her legs.

"Everett, what's T.J. doing?" Jillian says.

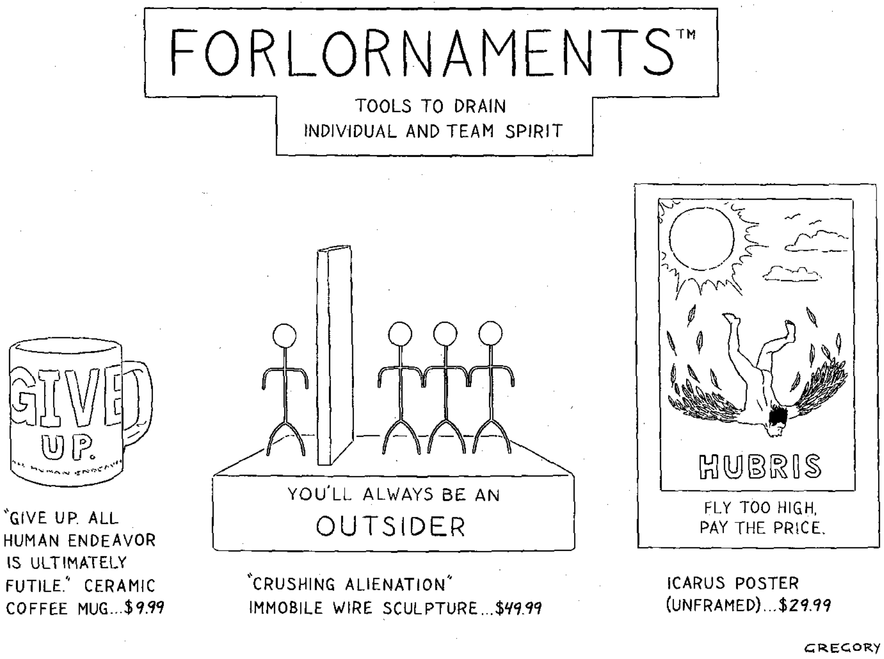
T.J. disappears behind the couch.

"Let the mouse coexist!" Gwen sobs.

"Good dog," I call. T.J. may wear silly, emasculating sweaters, but in his blood run the hunting instincts of the dachshunds of old, the great Prussian rabbit hunters.

"Go, T.J.," Thomas says.

I'm up in a crouch now, grasping the bannisters, my eyes peeled. My shoulders ache, but I sneer at the pain. Theresa is standing on the hearth, watching the couch, and I don't mind


FORLORNAMENTS™
TOOLS TO DRAIN INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM SPIRIT
GIVE UP.
"GIVE UP. ALL HUMAN ENDEAVOR IS ULTIMATELY FUTILE." CERAMIC COFFEE MUG...$9.99
YOU'LL ALWAYS BE AN OUTSIDER
"CRUSHING ALIENATION" IMMOBILE WIRE SCULPTURE...$49.99
HUBRIS
FLY TOO HIGH, PAY THE PRICE.
ICARUS POSTER (UNFRAMED)...$29.99
GREGORY

seeing dread in my daughter's eyes. She has always feared rodents, and I wonder if Huey the trucker, or Dr. Bob Beach, or Joseph Hederal himself could respond to this crisis as quickly as we Dose men have.

"There it goes," shrieks Luce.

The mouse charges toward the woodbox, with T.J. on its tail, and Gwen right behind the dachshund.

"He's rolling to you, Thomas."

"Ten-four, Dad."

"Watch out for Gwen Kirkle." I don't want my son kicked in the stones.

"Roger, Dad."

There's a whistling sound. With a life-ending thunk, the mouse is pinned to the wall by an arrow. All eyes fall on Dorry, who stands like a crusader beneath the Yule tree, her bow drawn, the string still humming. Her face is grim and bold.

Thomas still has his body tensed, his hands close to the floor. "Did something go down?" he says.

Luce Winningham exhales. "Whoa. Nice shot, Dorry."

T.J. pads over to the pinioned mouse, sniffs it, looks up at me sadly. I glare at Dorry.

"Damn." Theresa giggles. "Not a creature is stirring, I guess."

"What went down?" Thomas asks.

Gwen Kirkle sniffles. "Dorothy Smith killed one of God's little lambs, Thomas. That's what went down."

Abby uncaps the armrest of her wheelchair. From a snazzy little storage tube, she pulls out several Kleenex and hands them to Gwen.

Dorry fetches her arrow and cleans it. "Mice are standard household pests, Gwen. Their feces are a health hazard."

As Dorry wraps the mouse in a cocktail napkin, I protest her use of lethal force. "T.J. was handling the situation, Dorry. It was his kill."

Dorry takes the mouse out to our garage trash receptacle.

Gwen wipes her nose. "Is that true about the feces?"

When the archer returns, Theresa says, "Dorry Smith, our hero."

I feel my face go crimson.

At ten-thirty, Thomas yawns. Jillian allowed him three sips of brandy tonight.

"I'm hackneyed," Thomas says.

"We all are," Dorry says.

T.J. is curled in his basket. The time for book talk—for all talk—has passed. Luce Winningham stares at the fire embers, thinking, maybe, of Norbert Wilco, the man with whom she will not be opening Christmas gifts. Or perhaps she is thinking of her car, which is parked in our driveway and which will bear her away tonight. It's a Corsica, with a broken heater. I tried to fix the heater last week, and failed.

Gwen nudges Theresa. "Will Huey be home on Christmas?"

My daughter shakes her head. Her ears, which were naked in her childhood, are riddled with black adornments like buckshot.

"He'll be on a West Coast run," Theresa says. "Hauling kelp."

The Gorgons say nothing, as if kelp were a subject they had long ago exhausted. Bits of chocolate cake lie on the plates. The women slump in their places, sated and moody. I think about Nirvana, which, according to Buddha, is when nothing happens and you don't care about anything. Dorry says she has to go.

Luce gets to her feet. "We all do."

Thomas pads up the stairs, gives me a kiss, trundles to his bedroom. The women stand. Before they don their coats, they engage in yet another ritual of which I'll never be a part: the Gorgon goodbye hug. It appears to be a simple ceremony of each woman embracing every other, but I suspect that each Gorgon hug contains a mingling of female powers, possibly a trading of spiritual recipes.

"Goodbye, Gwen." I wave a hand between the bannisters. "Goodbye, Luce. Goodbye, Dorry."

None of them bid me adieu, although Dorry, who could have put me under her axe blade tonight, gives a slight bow. Then they're gone, and just my wife and daughter remain. Jillian holds up Theresa's coat so Theresa can wriggle her arms down the sleeves.

"Bye, Theresa," I say. "I love you."

My daughter cinches her scarf around her neck. She doesn't look up. "As long as you have nothing good to say about Huey, Everett, I have nothing good to say to you."

She clomps out the door, and Jillian shuts it.

"Well." I'm still caught, by the way. I'm looming over the room like a hunchback.

Jillian doesn't speak. She moves about the living room, collecting used glasses and plates on a tray. There's no music coming from our stereo. There hasn't been all night.

"Jills?" I feel suddenly panicked, sinful. "I'm sorry about the mouse, Jills. And, hey, the Chaos was delicious."

I get no reply. Jillian picks crumbs off the coffee table. Normally, at this time of night, I'm downstairs in front of the television, looking forward to sports highlights, and Jillian is in our bed with Joseph Hederal. It's Christmastime, though, and, as I said, it is sometimes my job to find the silver lining. So I risk it.

"Jillian," I say, "remember when we snorkeled around that shipwreck?"

Jillian freezes. We've never discussed that day. My wife turns slowly. In the light from the tree, she holds my gaze. I don't expect her to cry, and she doesn't.

I draw a breath. "Remember that thing? That . . . amazing thing that came between us?"

I hold the bars and watch my woman. I need her to remember this. T.J. shifts in his basket. It tweaks the cramp in my neck for me to smile at my wife, but I do it. She smiles back, almost shyly, for just a moment. Then she fades into the kitchen with the tray.

"All right, Everett," I whisper to myself. "All right."

My dachshund yawns. A crystal ornament falls from the tree and shatters, reminding me that I'm not Wesley Truth. I might not get that Popsicle, either, but I will get unstuck, I'm sure, soon enough, and get back to editing news, capably, and crooning Sinatra in the shower, badly. What I mean is, I hope to gain Heaven someday, but for now I'm here in Chicago, and I'm warm and I'm married and I'm home. ♦

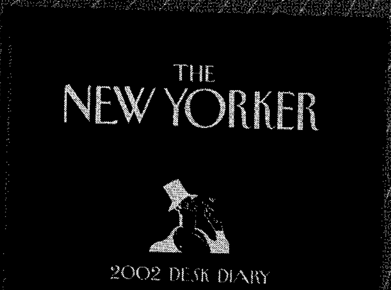
Advertisement

2002 IS STARING RIGHT AT YOU!

OCTOBER MONDAY 14
Columbus Day (observed)
OCTOBER TUESDAY 15
OCTOBER WEDNESDAY 16
OCTOBER THURSDAY 17
OCTOBER FRIDAY 18
OCTOBER SATURDAY 19
OCTOBER SUNDAY 20
NOTES
SEPTEMBER 2002
OCTOBER 2002
NOVEMBER 2002
PROFITS
"This is where things started getting really weird."

THE NEW YORKER DESK DIARY

- Travel-related toll-free numbers
- New York City listings and maps
- Expanded address section
- Reinforced pocket for notes and receipts


THE NEW YORKER
2002 DESK DIARY

ABOUT TOWN · NEW YORK CITY

To order by credit card, call toll-free 1.800.336.5510

or send check or money order with your name and address to:
The New Yorker, Box 10214, Dept. 065540-123, Des Moines, IA 50336-0214

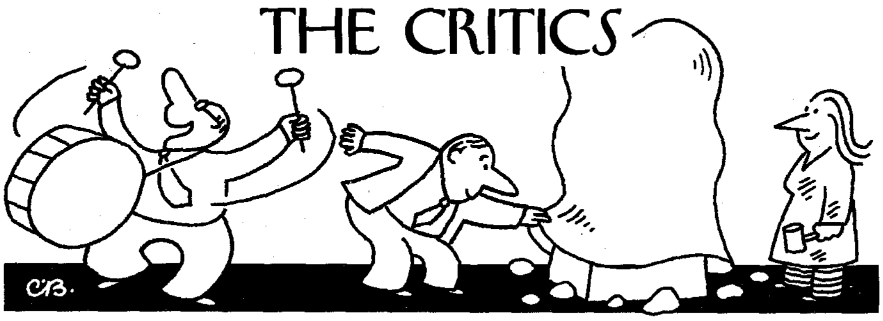
Yours for only $27.95* for the standard diary or $31.95* for the personalized version, plus $4.50 in the US ($6.75 in Canada) for shipping and handling. For personalized diaries please specify the name(s) to be imprinted (limited to 22 letters/spaces).

*Residents of CA, CO, GA, LA, IL, KY, MA, MI, NJ, NY, and OH add applicable sales tax. Canada 7% GST. Offer only available in US and Canada. Please allow up to 4 weeks for delivery.

© 2001 by The Condé Nast Publications Inc. All rights reserved.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

TRUE CONFESSIONS

The rediscovered novels of Italo Svevo, Italy's first modernist.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

In 1907, Ettore Schmitz, a Triestine businessman, found himself in need of a language tutor. Every year he spent a couple of months in England—his company had a branch there—and it pained him that his English was so bad. Friends recommended a certain James Joyce, who had landed in Trieste two years earlier and was making his living as an English teacher. Joyce was twenty-five, poor and unkempt, a frequenter of taverns, a borrower of rent money. He had not yet published a book, but he was full of confidence. He thought he was a genius. Schmitz, by contrast, was in his mid-forties, and though he was a comfortably settled bourgeois, a partner in a marine-paint company, this was due to his having married the daughter of the firm's owner. Before that, he had worked as a bank clerk. He was a genial, witty man, but self-effacing, passive.

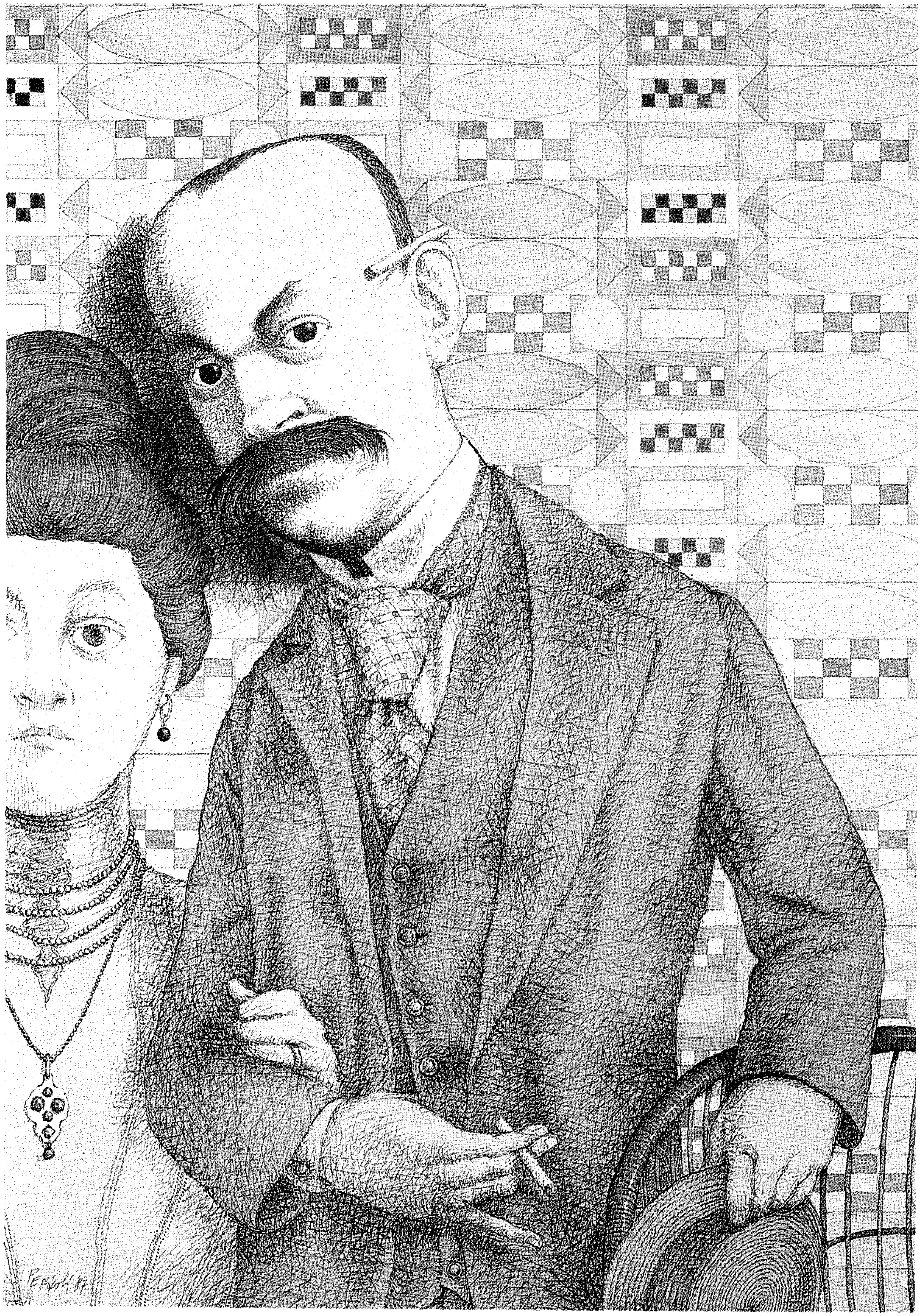
In the course of their tutorials, Joyce told Schmitz that he was a writer. He showed him the proofs of "Chamber Music," which was about to come out, and he gave him a few stories to read from a projected collection, "Dubliners." Eventually, Schmitz confessed that he, too, was a literary man, in a small way. Years before, under the pen name of Italo Svevo, he had written two novels, "Una Vita" and "Senilità" (they were later given the English titles "A Life" and "As a Man Grows Older"), and though the books were nothing, Schmitz said—published at his own expense, barely reviewed—perhaps Signor Joyce would be so kind as to accept copies of them? When Joyce returned for the next lesson, he declared that Schmitz was a marvellous writer, unjustly neglected, and that the great French realists could not have matched certain paragraphs of "As a Man Grows Older"—paragraphs that Joyce then recited from memory to the dazzled paint manufacturer.

There were no grammar lessons that day. Schmitz poured out his heart to Joyce, told him of his literary labors, his hopes, his disappointments. When the time was up, he could not bear to part with this fine man, and walked him almost all the way home, bending his ear some more. Nevertheless, he took no encouragement from Joyce's praise. After the failure of his second novel, ten years earlier, he had sworn off writing. (Once, when a business acquaintance asked him if it was true that he had published two novels, he said no—that was his brother Adolfo.) In 1915, Joyce left Trieste and moved to Zurich, then to Paris, but the two men remained in Christmas-card contact. Schmitz published nothing. The years passed.

Then came the First World War. Trieste was in an odd position. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—indeed, the empire's major seaport—yet historically it was Italian, and full of irredentists, ethnic Italians devoted to their homeland's reclaiming of its former territories. At the start of the war, many members of Schmitz's heavily irredentist family fled to Italy. His home, formerly crammed with relatives and servants, emptied out. At the same time, the Austro-Hungarian authorities closed down the paint factory. Schmitz and his wife, Livia, were stuck in the house with nothing to do, whereupon Schmitz broke his vow and started writing again. When the war stopped, he didn't, and in 1922, in a lather of energy—smoking like crazy, and barely coming down for meals—he completed a new novel, "Confessions of Zeno" ("La Coscienza di Zeno"). It was published the following year, again at his own expense, and it had the same reception as its predecessors.

Schmitz was terribly disappointed, but he had one last thought. He sent the book to his old English teacher. Joyce was a different man now, a famous artist ("Ulysses" was published in 1922) and an expert literary publicist. He wrote back saying that Schmitz should immediately send "Confessions of Zeno," on his recommendation, to Ford Madox Ford and T. S. Eliot in London, Gilbert Seldes in New York, and Valéry Larbaud and Benjamin Crémieux in Paris—an A-list of the literary arbiters of the day. Schmitz did as he was told, and two of these arrows hit the mark. In 1926, *Le Navire d'Argent*, a Paris journal devoted to modern literature, published excerpts from "As a Man Grows Older" and "Confessions of Zeno," translated by Crémieux and Larbaud, together with an enthusiastic essay on Schmitz by Crémieux. Suddenly, Italo Svevo was the sensation of Paris literary circles. The news made its way back to Italy, where the poet Eugenio Montale, alerted by the French, had just published a long essay in which he described Svevo's work as "the poem of our complex modern madness" and claimed that it was only because of the debased condition of Italian letters that he had been ignored. Soon Svevo's work was being translated into other languages. Dinners were given in his honor. When he entered literary cafés, people clapped him on the

Svevo's work was ignored until he published, in his sixties, "Confessions of Zeno." Then he was hailed as "the Italian Proust."


Pericoli '87

TULLIO PERICOLI

back and asked him to sit at their table.

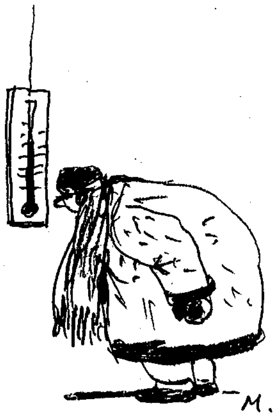
"No writer ever so enjoyed his fame," a friend of Svevo's wrote. Svevo acted as if he had won the lottery. He confessed to a journalist that on a recent trip to Paris, the birthplace of his celebrity, he could not see the *ville lumière*. All he could see was himself: "Italo Svevo among the treasures of the Louvre. . . Italo Svevo at Versailles." Hailed as the author of Italy's first modernist novel—"the Italian Proust," a French newspaper called him—he now took a look at modernist novels. He read Proust, or said he did. He struggled through "Ulysses," even gave a lecture on it. He discovered Kafka's work, and was bowled over by it. In 1928, he embarked on a new novel, a sequel to "Confessions of Zeno." At the same time, he began having health problems. He went to a spa, to take a cure, with Livia and their little grandson Paolo. On the way home, in a driving rain, the chauffeur crashed the car into a tree. Everyone survived except Svevo. His heart stopped the next day.

He had been famous for two years, but, even in Italy, his fame was unstable. During his lifetime, it was the younger writers who lionized him; the established critics were not pleased to be told by the French that they had failed to recognize a prophet in their own land, and they defended their former position. Also, nobody knew how to place Svevo. In the words of his best biographer, P. N. Furbank, "Attempts have been made to claim him for a variety of sectional interests—for Triestine regionalism, Italian irredentism, and 'eternal-Jewishness' " (he was Jewish), but he always fell short of the required commitment. Furthermore, his best novel, "Confessions of Zeno," was a comic novel, and comedy was not something that people in the nineteen-twenties associated with profundity.

Those who wished to dismiss him had something substantial to point to: his graceless Italian. Svevo's native language was the Triestine dialect; his second language, the language of his schooling, was German. (Hence his pen name, Italo Svevo: Swabian Italian.) Standard, Florentine Italian was a foreign tongue to him. That's what he had to write in if he wanted a readership beyond Trieste, but he did not do it beautifully or even, on occasion, grammatically. "The Italian of a bookkeeper," critics said. There is an answer to this. Svevo's characters *were* bookkeepers. The world of his fiction was Trieste, an unpoetic commercial city, home of bankers and traders and manufacturers, of which he was one. As Montale put it, "The smell of the warehouse and cellar, the almost Goldonian chatter of the Tergesteo"—the stock exchange—"are they not the sure presence of a style?" They are to us, raised on Twain and Dreiser and Hemingway. But the critics of Svevo's time were raised on d'Annunzio, and to them Svevo's language was simply unliterary.

It wasn't just in Italy, though, that Svevo was treated as second best. His work was never installed, as it should have been, in the pantheon of the modernist novel. I know people who have read "The Man Without Qualities," both volumes, and "Remembrance of Things Past," all seven volumes, who have never opened a book by Svevo.

They now have a chance to correct that oversight. Svevo is undergoing a publishing revival. "A Life," in a perfectly decent 1963 translation by Archibald Colquhoun (Pushkin Press; $18), has just been reprinted. As for "Senilità" and "La Coscienza di Zeno," they were first translated into English in the thirties, by Beryl de Zoete, a dance scholar who fell in love with Svevo's work and offered her services to his widow. De Zoete's versions, entitled "As a Man Grows Older" and "Confessions of Zeno," are solid—they are what we have known for seventy years as Svevo—and they are still in print or, in the case of "As a Man Grows Older," back in print ($12.95), in New York Review of Books' excellent "classics" series. But they are old, older than Svevo in a way: fussy, Constance Garnett-ish. For years they have cried out for competition, and competition has now come. Beth Archer Brombert has produced a version of "Senilità," called "Emilio's Carnival" (Yale; $14.95)—Svevo's working title—that is faithful in a way that de Zoete was not. Brombert's language is very plain, and when she comes up against a knot in Svevo's prose she does not try to untie it. (De Zoete did.) We have to puzzle through it, just like the Italians. The same rules seem to have guided the distinguished translator William Weaver in his new version of "La Coscienza di Zeno"—"Zeno's Conscience" (Everyman; $20). I do not like his title. The Italian *coscienza*, like its French cognate, means both "conscience" and "consciousness." There is no good way to translate it, and de Zoete's throwing up of hands, with "Confessions of Zeno," was probably the best solution. But the title is the only thing wrong with Weaver's book. Its appearance is an event in modern publishing. In it—for the first time, I believe, in English—we get the true, dark music, the pewter tints, of Svevo's great last novel.



Svevo had a happy childhood and a miserable young manhood. The sixth of eight children, he was born in Trieste in 1861 to an adoring mother and a gruff, decent father, a successful glassware merchant. As a child, he was mad for literature, but his father didn't want to hear about that. At the age of twelve, he was shipped off to a commercial school in Germany, where he managed to read a lot of Shakespeare and Schiller after lights-out. At seventeen, he returned to Trieste, and soon, presumably at his father's strong suggestion, he went to work as a correspondence clerk—basically, he translated letters—in a local bank. There he remained for almost twenty years, bored out of his mind. He spent his nights in the dusty reading room of the public library, submitting call slips to a bizarre attendant who, according to the poet Umberto Saba, Svevo's friend, "waited beside a window from which he eventually jumped to his death."

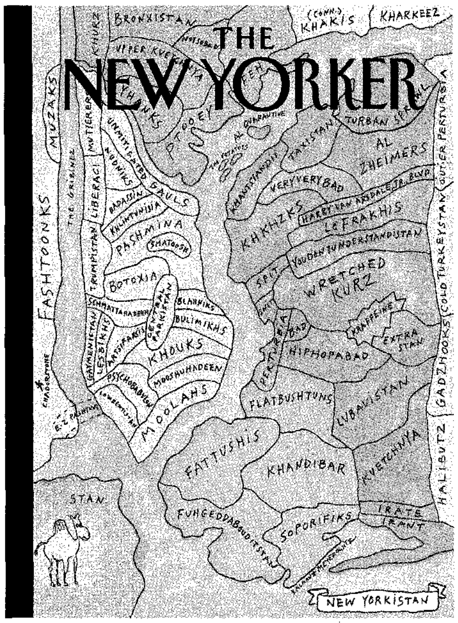
Svevo was now a convert to French realism: Balzac, Flaubert, Daudet, Zola above all. “Zola was his god,” his wife later wrote. (As part of the Svevo boom, her lovely, genteel biography, “Memoir of Italo Svevo,” has just been reprinted by Marlboro Press, at $15.95.) The laws of life seemed to him harsh, and those authors agreed. He tried to write—mostly plays, mostly unfinished—but, according to the diary of his brother Elio, the person closest to him, he burned almost everything he produced. When Svevo was twenty-five, Elio died, followed by two of their sisters. Meanwhile, the father’s business had declined precipitously, and the old man wandered around the house like a ghost, some days refusing to eat or speak. Svevo lived in a permanent, low-level melancholy. “My real strength always lay in hoping,” he wrote on his twenty-eighth birthday. “I’m even losing my talent for that.”

Two years earlier, he had begun his first novel, “A Life,” and it was a mirror of his own life. It tells the story of Alfonso Nitti, a clerk in a Triestine bank, who spends his evenings in the public library, dreaming of writing books. Alfonso seduces a rich girl whom he does not love. (See “The Red and the Black.”) His aged mother dies—a protracted business of bedsores and smells and people making off with the furniture. (See “Nana,” “Le Père Goriot.”) Alfonso cannot seem to *do* anything; he is too self-conscious, too busy watching himself. Some of this is very smartly done, worthy of its French models, but the qualities at the heart of the story actually have little to do with French realism. There is too much grave, personal sorrow—the book throbs like a wound—to be processed by that cold machinery. Also, Svevo simply did not have enough certainty to join the ranks of Balzac and Zola. His world was not theirs, the world of causes—social, historical, economic—but something almost causeless, the *mal du siècle*, in its turn-of-the-century form: the crippling of action by thought, the erasure of the present by the future (fantasy) and the past (remorse). Like Joyce and Proust soon afterward, he had discovered the subject of the twentieth-century novel, the self-imprisonment of the mind, but he didn’t know how to write anything but a nineteenth-century novel.

Nor, for a while, did he find out. After

ADVERTISEMENT

A SPECIAL OFFER FOR NEW YORKER READERS



“NEW YORKISTAN”
by Maira Kalman and Rick Meyerowitz
The New Yorker, December 10, 2001

More New Yorkistan!

The signed limited-edition lithographic prints have sold out. We now have smaller fine-art offset lithographic prints.
Acid-free paper, size 18"x 22"
Framed (U.S. and Canada only): $340
(plus $25 shipping and handling)
Unframed: $240
(plus $10 shipping and handling)

“When their cover came out, suddenly a dark cloud seemed to lift.”
— Sarah Boxer, *The New York Times*, December 8, 2001

To order online, visit www.cartoonbank.com or send check or money order made payable to The Cartoon Bank, with your name and address to: The Cartoon Bank, a New Yorker Magazine Company, 145 Palisade St. Suite 373, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. For Phone orders, call The Cartoon Bank at 1-800-897-TOON

*Residents of CA, CO, GA, IA, IL, KY, MA, MI, NY, OH, and PA add applicable sales tax. Canada 7% GST. Offer available only in U.S. and Canada.
Please allow two to four weeks for delivery. Thirty-day money-back guarantee.

lose weight together in the New Year

Duke Diet and Fitness Center
DUKE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SYSTEM

When it comes to losing weight and changing your lifestyle, there’s no better place than the Duke Diet & Fitness Center. Learn from one of the country’s best known and most successful weightloss centers. We offer a medically based, personalized approach to weight loss and lifestyle planning.

If you’re a new client, ask about our New Year Special. Bring a friend with you for a three- or four-week program and save $1,500 on the two program fees. Call the Duke Diet & Fitness Center today at **1-800-235-3853.**

www.dukedietcenter.org

Special effective for weeks beginning January 7 to February 24, 2002. Certain restrictions apply.

Tuscan Villa Rentals & Wine Consulting
Purple Fete LLC
• Award winning web site
• Privately owned Luxury Villas
• Personal Consultation
http://www.purplefete.com • 1(646)270-5999

Canoe Canada’s Arctic
Fly-in canoe trips on the remote tundra rivers of North America’s last great wilderness. Herds of caribou & muskoxen, white wolves, moose and grizzlies. Warm, arid summers. Wildlife biologist guide. Operating since 1974.
Brochure: **CANOE ARCTIC INC.** Box 130AK Fort Smith, NT, X0E 0P0, Canada (867) 872-2308
www.auroranet.nt.ca/canoe

For the discriminating vacationer
a commitment to excellence
Kiawah Island
Rentals and Sales
Pam Harrington Exclusives
843-768-0273 1-800-845-6966

Join us in our 18th year of walking the countryside of Europe.
BCT SCENIC WALKING
• Local Leaders • Gourmet Meals
• Country Inns • Scenic Footpaths
800-473-1210 www.bctwalk.com

"So what do you think of it?"

• •

the failure of "Una Vita," something happened that changed Svevo's life. At his mother's deathbed, a second cousin of his, Livia Veneziani, seeing his distress, brought him a glass of marsala. He had never noticed Livia before. Now he did. She was blond and kind and rich. Over her parents' objections—he was poor and neurotic and thirteen years her senior—they married in 1896 and had a baby, Letizia ("Happiness"), the following year.

"I will love you forever," Svevo wrote to Livia, "as far as the *fin de siècle* will allow." It allowed only so much. He drove her crazy with his jealousy and hypochondria. Nor could she understand his weird ideas. He gave her Schopenhauer to read, and August Bebel's "Women and Socialism." She looked at him as if he were insane. Also, why did he have to be Jewish? Anti-Semitism wasn't much of an issue in Trieste at that time, and Livia herself was one-quarter Jewish. Nevertheless, she was emphatically Catholic, a convent girl. After giving birth to Letizia, she fell ill and was terrified by the thought that she would die with the sin of having married a Jew on her conscience. Svevo gallantly went out and got himself baptized, though he refused to take religious instruction and never, later, described himself as anything but Jewish. (After his death, Livia returned the favor. In the late thirties, the "race office" in Rome balked at registering her as an Aryan—a problem she was told she could solve with a large bribe. Indignant, she declared herself a Jew. As a result, she had to flee Trieste in 1943. She spent the remaining war years in Treviso province, in great danger.) Yet, whatever their occasional bewilderment with each other, they were a happy couple. "My blonde," he called her, "my one great, great hope, of true, solid happiness." He might be "ill"—assailed by doubts and fears—but that was all right as long as he could orbit her "health." When he was downcast, she comforted him. When he took Letizia to the fair and came back alone—he was almost pathologically absent-minded—she went and got the child. In return, he became a regular person, a family man.

According to Svevo, Joyce used to say that a novelist had only one book in him; if he produced more, they were the same book, in a new key. No one demonstrates this principle better than Svevo. Emboldened by his happy marriage, he wrote a second novel, "Senilità." As the title tells us, it was once again about illness, but it breathed an utterly new assurance. Where "Una Vita" wandered about a lot, "Senilità" has one subject, the love affair between its hero, Emilio Brentani, a clerk in an insurance company (who once wrote a novel), and a high-class tart named Angiolina. With no introductory fuss, we meet the two of them on the first page, walking down the street, as Emilio, pedantically discoursing on his feelings for Angiolina, begins winding himself in a knot of obsession, jealousy, and contempt that will bind him to her for the rest of the book, and as she, tapping her pretty parasol in the gravel, looks at him to judge how she should play this game. The novel is perfectly realistic and, again, partly autobiographical. (Svevo had had such a girlfriend. She later became a circus performer.) As in Proust's tale of Swann and Odette, the love affair is a metaphor. Emilio is the mind; Angiolina is the world. Or, to put it in Svevo's terms, Emilio is "sickness," and Angiolina is "health." Neither comes off well, but the business of the novel is the portrayal of Emilio's feelings, fantastically mixed, with each new impulse undermined by its opposite. In other words, this is the same story as "Una Vita," but it is far more concentrated, subtle, and disturbing. As Emilio suffers over Angiolina, his spinster sister, Amalia, by way of participating, falls equally in love with a friend of his who barely notices her. In bed at night, Emilio hears through the walls the love cries she utters in her dreams.

"Senilità" is also far more confident in its tone, which is steadily distanced. At the end, Emilio, having lost both Angiolina and Amalia—Amalia dies, Angiolina runs off with a bank teller—lives on rather comfortably. In his mind, he combines the two women into one, whom he worships: "He saw her before him as on an altar. . . . She represented everything noble that he had thought and observed during that period." The irony is both soft and lethal. There was nothing noble in his relations with either of those women.

Furbank calls "Senilità" "one of the solidest masterpieces of nineteenth-century fiction." I think that it is a fine piece of work, but also that Svevo still had somewhere else to go. The novel's irony is heavy; it protests too much. (Whatever his comments on the fin de siècle, Svevo may still have hoped, with his marriage, to throw off his "illness.") And there are many things in the novel that grate against that tone. One small example: Angiolina has a younger sister, a scrawny little thing whose name we are never given. When we first encounter her, early in the narrative, she is ten years old. She opens the door for Emilio and, seeing a stranger, raises her hand "to close the edges of her jacket across her chest—the buttons were missing." At the end of the book, Emilio calls on Angiolina's family again. He is received by the mother, but she promptly exits, and then the sister, maybe twelve now, enters the room and curtsies. Emilio tells her what he meant to tell her mother, that he will never come again. She protests, and covers his face with "kisses that were anything but childish." Clearly the mother is thinking that if she can no longer offer Angiolina's services (Emilio helped support the family), perhaps the sister's will do. Emilio is disgusted and gets up to go. But first he leans down and pats the head of the little girl, "whom he did not want to leave disheartened." He remembers that she is a child. This is not the stuff of which Zolaesque novels are made. Likewise, throughout the book there are notes of sweetness and drollery which suggest that a different novel, one more forgiving of "sickness" and of life itself, is fighting to get out. It got out—in "La Coscienza di Zeno"—but not for twenty-five years.

We will never know what happened to Svevo in those years to lead him out of realism and into modernism. Perhaps it was just age and self-acceptance, or perhaps it was the war. But one thing that we know made a difference—not as a cause but as a trigger—was Freud. During his idle war years, Svevo became interested in the sage of Vienna; he even made a stab at translating him. Some critics believe that "La Coscienza di Zeno" is a Freudian book—that to Svevo, as to a psychoanalyst, the hero, Zeno, is "sick," his reasoning is self-delusion, and if he would just confront the true causes of his behavior he would be cured. It is hard to understand how anyone coming up against the desperate comedy and muted tragedy of "Zeno" could imagine that any of this had "causes," or could be cured. It doesn't look like an illness; it looks like life, and art. According to Furbank, Svevo thought psychoanalysis was worthless as a treatment. (His crazy brother-in-law Bruno was analyzed by Freud and came back two years later crazier than ever.) What interested him in Freud was the theory of defense mechanisms: rationalization, displacement, the whole arsenal of self-justification. This is what he himself had been analyzing for years, in "Una Vita" and "Senilità," and in his own life.

More than confirming his ideas, Freud suggested to Svevo a new kind of novelistic structure. Before, Svevo had given us his heroes' mental processes in standard third-person narrative. Emilio felt this, Emilio felt that, sometimes at tedious length. But what if, instead of observing the modern mind from the outside—its immersion in thought, its paralysis of will, its tangled motives, its confusion of time planes—what if the novelist were to record this from the inside, let the hero tell his own story, in a way that reflected as faithfully as possible the movements of his psyche? In other words, what if the novel, instead of describing a cat's cradle, *became* a cat's cradle? And so, jumping the gun on "Portnoy's Complaint" by almost fifty years, Svevo made "La Coscienza di Zeno" the hero's confessions to his psychoanalyst.

The book opens with a preface by the psychoanalyst, Dr. S., who informs us that the following material is a testimonial by his patient Zeno Cosini. Zeno, whose father believed him incompetent to manage his inheritance and therefore put an accountant in charge, is a man with little to do. He entered psychoanalysis to find out why that little was being done so badly. Dr. S. got him to write up his memories, but then, just as the doctor was about to dig in to this delicious material—so full of truths and lies, he says—Zeno suspended treatment. Dr. S. is publishing the manuscript in revenge.

There follows the manuscript, Zeno's account of crucial episodes in his life: his efforts to stop smoking; the death of his father; his love for a beautiful girl named Ada Malfenti and his marriage to her homely sister Augusta; his affair with a singer named Carla; and his business partnership with Guido Speier, the man who won Ada. All this happens in five chapters. Then comes the final chapter, again written by Zeno, but a year later, after the beginning of the First World

advertisement
logon
The New Yorker's advertisers invite you to find out more about their products and services.

BERNARD COHEN OF LONDON
1.404.888.0558
www.bernardcohen.com

BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY
1.866.372.1199
www.travelbritain.org/2001

CEIBA DEL MAR HOTEL & SPA
1.877.545.6221
www.ceibadelmar.com

COACH
www.coach.com

INCA - INTERNATIONAL NATURE AND CULTURAL ADVENTURES
www.inca1.com

LANDS' END
1.800.489.9078
www.landsend.com

NORTHWEST AIRLINES INC.
1.800.225.2525
www.nwa.com

PENDLETON COWGIRL CO.
www.cowgirlcompany.com

SILVER HILL HOSPITAL
1.800.899.4455
www.silverhillhospital.com

SWAROVSKI CRYSTAL ON-LINE
1.888.207.9873
www.swarovski.com

SIT4LESS.COM
1.877.490.LESS
www.NY.sit4less.com

STEUBEN
1.800.424.4240
www.steuben.com

TOYOTA
www.toyota.com/tomorrow

For more information, log on to www.newyorker.com and click on The New Yorker Reader Link.

War. In it, he announces that everything he wrote for Dr. S. was a tissue of lies. He is no longer neurotic; he has been cured, by the war. He needs to get the manuscript back and rewrite it, this time accurately.

And so the modernist novel was born in Italy. Chronological time is gone. As in Joyce and Proust, the past is folded into the present. Also gone, as in the work of Svevo's colleagues, is truth. If we want Zeno's real story, we can choose among the conflicting accounts of three witnesses: Dr. S., the earlier Zeno, and the later Zeno. Even within the individual narratives, every story casts doubt on itself. Zeno's confession begins with a comedy, the story of his going to a sanatorium in order to stop smoking. But, without ever ceasing to be comic, the tale gently tips over into pathos. A nurse, Giovanna, assigned to supervise Zeno's detoxification, ends up giving him a handful of cigarettes because she is old and lonely and the wily Zeno has convinced her that when he is primed with nicotine no woman is safe in his presence. He smokes them all and then escapes from the sanatorium.

In the next chapter, "My Father's Death," the logic is the opposite. The story is scathing—Zeno's account of how insensitive he was to his dying father—but it is also very funny, and it has a real tragic grandeur. At one point, the father, unable to get comfortable in bed, moves to an armchair and gazes out the window at the starry sky:

> I tried to identify the exact point of the sky at which he was staring. He looked up, his trunk erect, with the effort of someone peering through an aperture too high for him. It seemed to me he was looking at the Pleiades. Perhaps in his whole life he had never looked so long at something so far off. Suddenly he turned to me and, still erect, he said: "Look! Look!" with an air of severe admonition. He went back immediately to staring at the sky, then he faced me once more: "You see? You see?"

The father is trying, before he dies, to pass on to his feckless son some important truth that he has discovered. But the very discovery, as Zeno points out, was "the first symptom of a cerebral hemorrhage." The father has found the meaning of life, and it is death.

Svevo took his psychoanalytic model seriously. Often we see the defenses working quite openly, yet they operate with a truth that is not just psychological but literary. When Zeno falls in love with Ada Malfenti, he never notices that she is utterly wrong for him. He is a nut; she is a serious girl. She can't stand him. Finally, one night, he proposes to her:

> I have forgotten the many scornful words she addressed to me, but not her beautiful, noble, and healthy face flushed with outrage, its lines made sharper as if chiseled by her indignation. This I never afterwards forgot, and when I think of my love and my youth, I see again the beautiful and noble and healthy face of Ada at the moment when she dismissed me definitively from her destiny.

A psychoanalytic mechanism, repression, has become a literary mechanism, omission, and Ada's words, however deleted, are burned on our brains.

Elsewhere, the situation is more mixed, unsettlingly so. Once Zeno is happily married, Augusta, who knew of his love for Ada, has a moment's vestigial jealousy, and imagines that Zeno is still pining for her sister. By this time, Ada is ill with goiter—her beauty is destroyed—and Zeno, thinking to reassure Augusta, cruelly puffs out his cheeks and bugs out his eyes in imitation of Ada's ruined face. Augusta laughs and is immediately ashamed, but that is nothing compared with what takes place in Zeno's mind. Painfully, even as he is mocking Ada's face, he feels as though he were kissing her. Later, he says, "When I was alone, I repeated that effort several times, with desire and repulsion." Nothing like this, nothing so psychologically exact and so morally confounding, had ever been recorded in the Italian novel—indeed, in the European novel.

With Svevo's shift from realism to modernism came an enormous gain in charity. In "Una Vita" and "Senilità" the mistress is a bitch; the death in the family is a nightmare; the hero can barely endure his self-contempt. In "Zeno" the mistress, Carla, is a sweet girl, with shining braids; the father's death is leavened with comedy; and the hero's shame is seen with a wise eye. Before Zeno beds Carla, he has a dream about her, in which he is kissing her white neck, then eating it. But her neck never bleeds; it remains whole. Furthermore, Augusta is there, and Zeno says to her, "I won't eat it all; I'll leave a piece for you, too." This is a psychological truth, a negotiation between desire and guilt, but it is also a moral truth. Everyone gets a bite; no one is hurt. Augusta never finds out about the affair, and it is Carla who eventually breaks it off. She dumps Zeno and marries her singing teacher.

In his later years, the years surrounding "Zeno," Svevo had a few things to say about Mother Nature. She was not on our side, he claimed, but neither was she against us. She just had a lot on her mind, and we reaped the benefits of her inattention. "Mother Nature," he wrote, "created sexual pleasure to guarantee reproduction. If, having obtained that, she allows the capacity for pleasure to go on existing, she does so only out of absentmindedness, just as certain insects go on wearing their mating colors after the mating season is over. Running a business of that size, you can't attend to every detail." And so it is in "Zeno." Zeno loses Ada but gets a better woman, Augusta. He is defeated by Guido, but then he has the satisfaction—and the pain, he protests, the pain!—of seeing Guido defeat himself, indeed commit suicide, by accident. Guido takes Veronal, but he meant to be rescued. He was only trying to pressure Ada into investing some money in his business. But the doctor arrives too late. Zeno, standing over Guido's corpse, sees on his face "a great stupefaction at being dead without having wanted to be"—a perfect Svevianism.

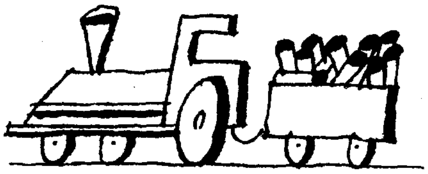
But there are perfect Svevianisms on every page of Svevo. Why does Carla drop Zeno? Well, Carla asks to see his wife, and he agrees, but at the last minute, for some reason—ask Dr. S.—he arranges for Carla, waiting on a street corner, to see Ada rather than Augusta. Unfortunately, as Zeno does not realize, Ada knows her husband is having an affair, and she is heartbroken—a fact that the good-hearted Carla understands instantly. If Zeno had allowed Carla to see Augusta—happy, dumpy, unaware of her husband's derelictions—everything would have been O.K. But no, Carla sees Ada, and believes herself to be the cause of that poor woman's grief, and tells Zeno to go back to her. Zeno cannot bring himself to confess his ruse, so that's the end of his relationship with Carla of the shining braids. This is something that could have been imagined only by Svevo. He is a thorny item, a one-masterpiece master, but a master nevertheless. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

I'll Let You Go, *by Bruce Wagner (Villard; $25.95).* Wagner's earlier novels, "Force Majeure" and "I'm Losing You," applied a scalpel-sharp wit to the entertainment world, dissecting (and sometimes disembowelling) Hollywood hypocrisies and excesses. Here he returns to the same territory, but with a hyper-baroque style and a decidedly Dickensian agenda: the twelve-year-old multimillionaire Tull Trotter, whose family is among the richest in America, struggles with the emotional poverty of his upbringing and longs for his missing father, while Amaryllis Kornfeld, an almost stereotypical homeless waif, aspires to spiritual purity in the wake of her mother's murder. As the children—along with Tull's two cousins—attempt to connect with each other and with their fractured families, they must navigate Wagner's Los Angeles, a city overflowing with eccentric philanthropists and violent madmen.

The Path of Minor Planets, *by Andrew Sean Greer (Picador; $23).* After witnessing a child fall to his death during a comet sighting on an island in the South China Sea, two astronomers try to shake off the pull of gravity in a love affair. Eli is married to a woman he adores but doesn't understand; Denise's sheltered, brainy childhood has left her "angry and terrified, jealous of other people's lives—their youths spent making love in old cars and graveyards." Over almost three decades, the lovers approach and retreat again, their desire elusive even to themselves. In this début novel, Greer pinpoints the "tiny hidden madnesses in ordinary people" with unerring accuracy, and, in prose littered with sparks, makes palpable the longing for the celestial.

Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew Poems, *translated and introduced by Bernard Lewis (Princeton; $19.95).* Lewis, one of the foremost scholars of the Middle East, has devoted much of his career to the history of Islam; this volume collects his translations of poems—nearly all appearing in English for the first time—that span eleven centuries and four major Middle Eastern traditions. Many of the most striking works address, in spare, stirring lines, the twin demands of serving the self and serving God: "Love is a lamp of God, I am its moth; / love is a shackle, my heart its crazy captive." For the Sufi poets in particular, poetry is an occasion for mystical experience, and their work frequently offers a vision of transcendence that is grounded in the senses: "O Sun of Tabriz, I am so tipsy here in this world, / I have no tale to tell but tipsiness and rapture."



Celluloid Skyline, *by James Sanders (Knopf; $45).* In these densely illustrated pages, Sanders proposes that there have been two New Yorks throughout the twentieth century—the real city where we live, and a dream, or movie, city, made up of images and models and sets and mattes. He traces the history of the dream city from "At the Foot of the Flatiron" (1903) to "Smoke" (1995), and shows the places where the two cities' histories overlap and where they argue. To his great credit, he sees the dream city not as a myth in need of deconstruction but as a commentary in need of explication—a kind of parallel universe, neither more nor less fantastic than the subject it mimics and enlarges. The dream city, he points out, usually responded to New York realities—the city of "Taxi Driver" is as much a dream as the city of "42nd Street" and contains the same kind of encoded truth. Sanders also includes a running critique of New York in film. He is subtle—his analysis of the difference between the Manhattan of "Annie Hall" and the Manhattan of "Manhattan," two years later, is worth the price of admission—and, to judge by the movies he praises ("Rear Window," "The Clock," "King Kong," "Do the Right Thing"), he is also sound.

free catalog
TEAKscapes
first quality teak garden furniture
KITS OR ASSEMBLED
the choice is yours!
CRAFTED IN THE U.S.A.
FACTORY DIRECT PRICES
– a complete line
from $220
866 FOR TEAK (367-8325)
www.teakscapes.com/rocker2
Suite 202Y0210
47 Steve's Lane
Gardiner, NY 12525

National Arts Journalism Program najp
The National Arts Journalism Program at **Columbia University** awards **fellowships** to mid-career and senior **arts and cultural journalists**.
Call us at 212.854.1912, visit **www.najp.org**, or e-mail najp@columbia.edu.
Application deadline extended to February 26

Deep Prairie
out-of-the-ordinary-out-of-town-art
Jan 10 - Jan 19
702-526 W 26th St., NYC
(306) 569-9279
info@susanwhitneygallery.com
www.susanwhitneygallery.com
SUSAN WHITNEY *Gallery*

6 Million Pieces!
China, Crystal, Silver, Collectibles
125,000 Patterns • Old/New • Buy/Sell
REPLACEMENTS, LTD.
1-800-REPLACE (1-800-737-5223)
PO Box 26029, Greensboro, NC 27420 • Dept YO
www.replacements.com

CULTURAL WALKING ADVENTURES
Small Groups • Expert Guides
Exceptional hotels and cuisine
40 destinations in Europe, North America, Latin America and Africa.
Call 800-200-3887 or www.classicjourneys.com
CLASSIC JOURNEYS

Art in Provence
paint and live the beauty
Spring & Fall workshops for painters of all levels
Experienced instructors · Charming host
For brochure: (802) 457-5169 • www.artinprovence.com

MUSICAL EVENTS

DISSONANT LOVERS

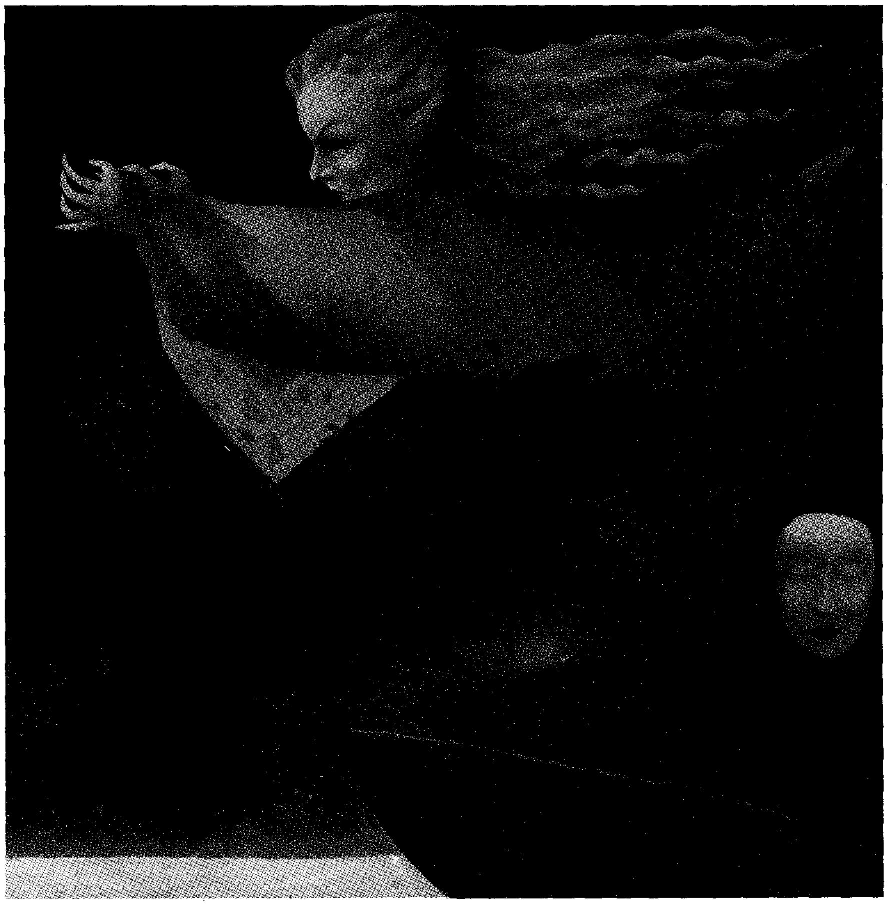
Couples therapy with Richard Strauss.

BY ALEX ROSS

"The Emperor must turn to stone." Such is the obscurely chilling mantra of Richard Strauss's "Die Frau Ohne Schatten," or "The Woman Without a Shadow," which is playing at the Metropolitan Opera for the first time in more than a decade. The words and the music have a dire energy that seems to point outside the opera's fairy-tale world. Perhaps, as so often, the composer was thinking about himself: he wrote "Die Frau" during the First World War, and he may have sensed that the postwar world would greet his "last romantic opera" as an awkward antique. Progressives and conservatives came to agree that Germany's greatest composer was a hollow man, a virtuoso lacking soul. "Strauss can charm and delight, but he cannot move," Stravinsky said. "His music is wonderful, especially his songs, but his character is miserable," Adolf Hitler said. Were they both right, or were they missing something?

In any event, "Die Frau," once dismissed as a neo-Wagnerian fiasco, has become a repertory item on European stages, and its return to the Met was greeted with some of the most thunderous ovations that have been heard in the house in a while. The libretto is by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Strauss's longtime collaborator, and it's a doozy. The Emperor of the Seven Seas marries a woman from the spirit world, but her inability to cast a shadow (read: to bear children) causes him to turn to stone. A witchlike Nurse leads the Empress to the house of Barak the Dyer, where the Dyer's Wife is bored and looking for distraction. The Nurse offers a Faustian deal: surrender your shadow to the Empress and you will get earthly rewards, including a Young Man. It is a "Magic Flute"-style test of character, from which both the Empress and the Dyer's Wife emerge unscathed. Even the parts of the story that don't make sense ring true. These characters are sacrificing the glitter of their dream lives in order to maintain the mundane beauty of married life.

"Die Frau" would collapse under the weight of its pretensions if the scheme were not spelled out clearly in musical terms. The Emperor and the Empress begin with bright, insidiously whistleable major-key tunes, but there is something unreal about them. Then the harmony darkly implodes, as major and minor triads collide across the interval of a minor third. This is the sound of the Emperor turning to stone. The chords are derived from Wagner's music for the death of Tristan, and they tend to show up in Strauss's music whenever extinction threatens the living. They appear underneath Salome's famous dictum "The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death." They are blasted out at the end of "Elektra," as the title character falls lifeless to the ground. And they are present in "Metamorphosen," written in 1945, which depicts the death of an entire national culture.



Deborah Voigt, as the Empress, goes from radiant innocence to anguished desperation.

ANA JUAN

The songfulness of "Die Frau," then, blooms at the edge of a harmonic abyss. Although the opera came in the wake of Strauss's alleged retreat from modernism, in "Der Rosenkavalier," it contains a fair amount of scalding dissonance. The Nurse becomes very Clytemnestra-like as her black magic fails to have the desired effect: just before she is banished from the scene, the orchestra screams one of the bitonal chords of "Elektra." And when the Emperor is shown in his ossified state the harmony topples over into nothingness, pushed by a phalanx of unison brass. Far from being a regressive work, "Die Frau" is an overview of Strauss's polymorphous world. In it, human beings waver between their capacity for selfless love and their capacity for self-annihilation. Given the major-key bluster of the work's conclusion, it seems as though things could have gone either way.

The Met production of "Die Frau" plays through January 17th. Patrons should be warned that it is a long evening, nearly five hours in all. It is, however, a fast five hours as these things go. The conductor, Christian Thielemann, has restored the passages in the third act that are usually cut, making the opera more fluid and coherent. It helps, too, that Thielemann has as sure a command of the composer's idiom as any conductor today. Strauss urged performers to bring out qualities of lightness and brilliance in his music, and, this time, his wish has come true. The spastic quality that marked Thielemann's performances of "Arabella" and "Rosenkavalier" a few years back is gone. On opening night, he refused to luxuriate in Strauss's orchestration, even as he made its colors glow, and he never drowned out the voices. The performance radiated intelligence and warmth.

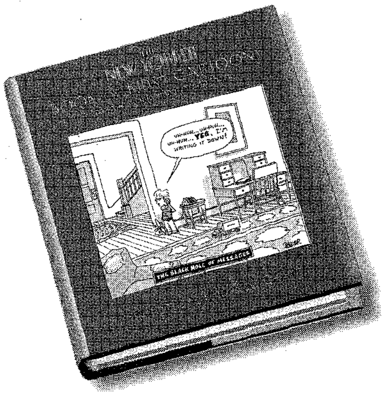
Deborah Voigt sang the Empress with her usual easy-sailing splendor. A Strauss soprano of potentially historic distinction, she succeeded in embodying the elusive spirit of the composer—a smoldering fire—which few of his contemporaries saw. The stages of the Empress's transformation were beautifully controlled. We first met the character in a state of innocent self-satisfaction, which took the form of Voigt finding pleasure in her own magnificent voice: pearly high notes, frivolous roulades, even a Marilyn Monroe-like purr. Later, she grew uncertain, fearful, desperate. By the end, she was standing at the lip of the stage, shouting instead of singing, as if the imprisonment of the Emperor would also mean the end of her operatic career. Most singers deliver only fragments of the spoken-word monologue with which the Empress expresses her anguish, but Voigt tackled it all, and in the daringly long silence that followed you could hear her gasping for breath.

The rest of the cast only occasionally matched Voigt's authority. Gabriele Schnaut, as the Dyer's Wife, had fewer pitch issues than usual, but she still made some ungodly sounds. Her understanding of the character was limited and crude. At times, I wished that Thielemann would do a James Levine and render her inaudible. Thomas Moser, as the Emperor, and Wolfgang Brendel, as Barak, were both sympathetic, though they were slow to warm up. Reinhild Runkel delivered a satisfying account of the Nurse, finding a tone of icy superiority in a character who can come off as merely peevish. Julia Faulkner gave lustre to the offstage role of the Falcon.

Herbert Wernicke's production has some wonderful effects, mostly in the spirit-world scenes. Nebulas, starscapes, and clouds of color shimmer in a corridor of mirrors, creating a mood reminiscent of Carl Sagan's "Cosmos." Barak, in what seems like an entirely unrelated story, lives in the boiler room of an East German factory, with a beat-up old refrigerator full of beer. There are touches of standard-issue directorial kitsch: lights shining in the audience's eyes; segments of the set going away, coming back, going away again; costumes that might have been picked up at David Bowie's yard sale. Somehow, these all-too-familiar conceits manage not to get in the way of the opera. The audience cheered Wernicke lustily, which I took to be an indirect vote of confidence in the often maligned score and libretto.

This was a production set in the great postmodern nowhere to which so many operas are now consigned. If only the Met could have had the "Frau" that Robert Carsen presented in Vienna, in 1999—a staging steeped in the sensibility of the Art Nouveau period, out of which the opera arose. The Empress was an haute-bourgeoise socialite undergoing psychoanalysis, and the remainder of the plot emanated from her subconscious. A film sequence in Act II suggested that she had been abused as a child and had fled into a fantasy world as a result. Gimmicky-sounding on paper, this conception was shattering in effect. In scene after scene, the lurking darkness of the music was crystallized onstage.

People seem to think that whenever "Die Frau" works as theatre someone has saved it from itself. They are reluctant to admit that it is the handiwork of a composer who breathed life into almost everything he touched. ♦



Rediscover...
the child within

THE PERFECT GIFT
for anyone
who was ever
a child—
or a parent

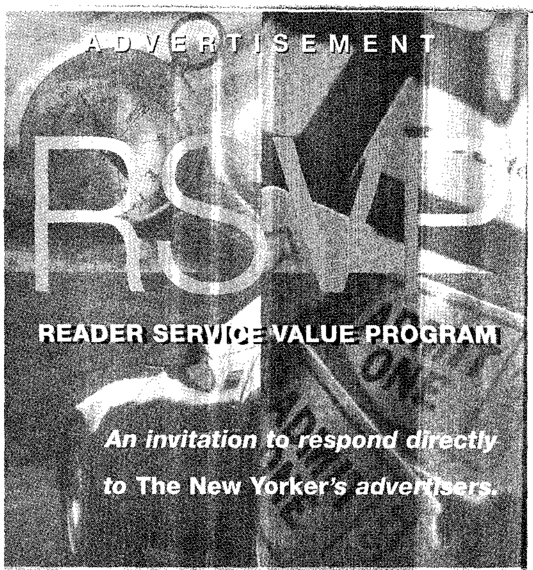
Contains 126 classic
New Yorker cartoons
that spotlight our
rollicking relationship
with children—
and theirs with
the adult world

With a special illustrated
introduction by **Roz Chast**

Bloomberg PRESS

AVAILABLE WHERE
BOOKS ARE SOLD,
by calling **1-888-417-9597**, or at
www.bloomberg.com/books

©[illegible] Bloomberg L.P. All rights reserved. BLOOMBERG and BLOOMBERG PRESS are trademarks and service marks of Bloomberg L.P.



ADVERTISEMENT

RSVP

READER SERVICE VALUE PROGRAM

An invitation to respond directly to The New Yorker's advertisers.

AUTOMOTIVE

TOYOTA. *For more information on Toyota innovations* and technologies that positively impact the world in which we live, visit us at www.toyota.com/tomorrow.

CULTURE

ONASSIS CULTURAL CENTER. Ilias Lalaounis *Microsculptures - idols of the Stone Age to the Helix* of Contemporary Genetics at the Onassis Cultural Center through February 10, 2002. Admission Free.

FURNISHINGS & ACCESSORIES

REPLACEMENTS, LTD. World's largest inventory of old and new china, crystal, silver and collectibles. Over 120,000 patterns. Free pattern printout with prices. Call us toll-free at 1-800-REPLACE or visit our Web site at www.replacements.com.

REAL ESTATE

CLUB COZUMEL CARIBE, a residential apartment beach club. Short and long-term rentals in a close-to-home, non-polluted setting. World class entertainment among friendly and happy citizens. Visit our Web site at www.cozumelcaribe.com or e-mail apts@cozumelcaribe.com.

TRAVEL

BREAKAWAY ADVENTURES. Undiscovered France and Italy: walking and cycling vacations throughout Europe featuring charming inns, gourmet cuisine, and regional wines. Escorted or fully supported self-guided options. Call 1-800-567-6286.

HOTEL DEREK—an adventurous departure from Houston's traditional hotel offerings. Derek is new. Derek is different. Derek is anything but mundane. For information, call us at 713-961-3000 or visit our Web site at www.hotelderek.com.

KIAWAH ISLAND BY PAM HARRINGTON EXCLUSIVES. Thirty minutes from historic Charleston. Select one- to ten-bedroom accommodations. Golf, tennis, biking, children's programs and much more. Call us toll-free at 1-800-845-6966.

KD RIVER CRUISES OF EUROPE. See Europe from a different perspective. Take a KD River Cruise on the Rhine, Elbe, Danube, and Europe's other historic waterways. For a free brochure, call 1-800-RIVER-KD, or visit our Web site at www.rivercruises.com.

THE FEARRINGTON HOUSE is a luxurious five-diamond inn and restaurant nestled in the countryside south of Chapel Hill, NC. For information call 1-919-542-2121 or visit www.fearrington.com.

For more information, log on to www.newyorker.com and click on The New Yorker Reader Link.

IF UNABLE TO REACH TELEPHONE LISTINGS, SEND REQUESTS, WITH ISSUE DATE NOTED, TO THE NEW YORKER READER SERVICES, 4 TIMES SQUARE, 21ST FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10036.

020107

© 2002 The Condé Nast Publications Inc. All Rights Reserved

THE CURRENT CINEMA

GAME BOY

Russell Crowe takes on the life of the Nobel laureate John Nash.

BY ANTHONY LANE

Remember the titans of "Apollo 13"? Not the astronauts but the wonks back on earth: the guys with slide rules, their spectacle frames as thick as fenders, who tipped a load of rocket junk onto a table and had to brainstorm their way to finding a few more volts for the lost boys, up in space. Now the wonks—or, at least, one of their kind—have moved to the center of the stage. It is as if the director of "Apollo 13," Ron Howard, had felt their unworldly brilliance nagging at him, plucking at his elbow, and decided to investigate the matter afresh. And so we arrive at "A Beautiful Mind," and at the figure of John Nash (Russell Crowe): a real person, still living today, although he was barely alive during long, unwatered tracts of the last half century. His appeal to the easily awed conscience of the big-budget filmmaker consists of two clashing strains: Nash is a Nobel laureate, and he is also a victim of paranoid schizophrenia.

He was born in West Virginia in 1928 and educated at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, in Pittsburgh; in 1948—or "1947," as the film prefers to put it—he arrived at Princeton, as a graduate student in math. His 1950 doctoral thesis was twenty-seven pages long; it involved what became known as the Nash equilibrium, one of the fundamentals of game theory. Forty-four years later, this discovery resulted in the Nobel Prize in Economics—an ironic honor, perhaps, since Nash never trained as an economist, and I'm not sure I would ever have trusted so singular a talent with my weekly shopping. He was, and remains, a mathematician; the rapport, or narrow-eyed lack of it, between pure and applied math is something that few of us are qualified to discuss, but Nash's contributions have been applied to subjects as diverse as political science and evolutionary biology. If that's impure, give me more.

Nash's story is well told by his biographer, Sylvia Nasar, in "A Beautiful Mind," the book that underpins Howard's film. The book is far superior to the film; study the two together and you will receive a master class in the art of the Hollywood massage. It is true, for instance, that Nash had an inspired summer of mental activity in 1949; what is less certain is that he and some friends were in a bar, that they gazed in competing lubricity at a blonde, and that the friends disappeared in little black puffs of smoke, leaving Nash to sprint back to his office and complete his thesis. That is the movie's version of events, and it fails not because of its wish to simplify, which is fair enough, but because the image it comes up with is not simple at all; it is a confusing, if pretty, mess of special effects, like the numbers that flash and glow at us when Nash is attempting to crack an unsolvable code.

Then, there is his personal life, which grew more eccentric and distressing the further he drifted away from the calculable. Howard makes him a shy, prickly virgin who is salvaged from himself by the love of one good woman, Alicia Larde (Jennifer Connelly). Now compare a slice of his actual résumé, as recounted by Nasar: "Between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-nine, Nash became emotionally involved with at least three other men. He acquired and then abandoned a secret mistress who bore his child." Oops. Nevertheless, one does not, as a rule, attend Ron Howard films for the pleasures of the flesh, and there

The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for six combined issues: Feb. 18 & 25, Apr. 22 & 29, June 17 & 24, Aug. 19 & 26, Oct. 14 & 21, Dec. 23 & 30) by The Condé Nast Publications Inc. (4 Times Square, N.Y., N.Y. 10036-6592), which is a subsidiary of Advance Publications, Inc. Vol. LXXVII, No. 42, January 7, 2002. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037-0684. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

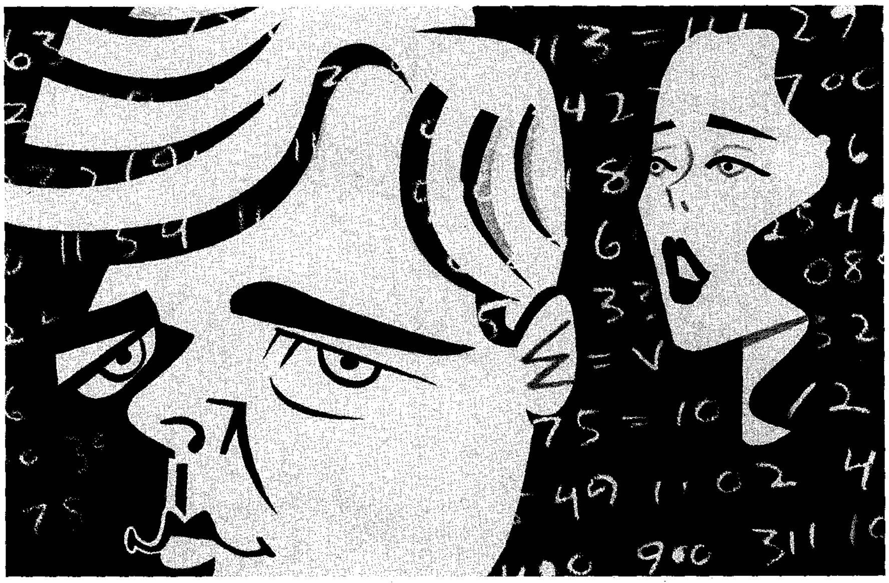
is something blushingly nineteen-fifties in the speed with which "A Beautiful Mind" proceeds from Nash and Alicia's first kiss to their sunny wedding day and so—hey, presto!—to the bump of her first pregnancy. I am not sure if pressure groups continue to campaign against the prevalence of gratuitous sex in American cinema, but, if you are still out there hunting for material, could you please write and tell me where I can find the stuff? It seems to have gone missing.

Also present at the wedding, peering grimly from a car, is William Parcher (Ed Harris), a senior spook who recruits our hero to the cause of national security. Nash, the numbers cruncher extraordinaire, is assigned the task of detecting Soviet encryptions in American newspapers. It so happens that, from the beginning of 1959, Nash displayed symptoms of schizophrenia, and he spent large portions of his adulthood in psychiatric hospitals, once in the voluble company of Robert Lowell; as is often the case, the content of Nash's delusions was grandly pathetic (he spoke of messages from alien beings, felt personally threatened by Napoleon, and believed himself to be "the left foot of God"), whereas the movie lends his ravings a thrillerish spice. Movies, by and large, are themselves locked into the delusion that there is something liberating in the loss of sanity; Hollywood likes every *savant* to be touched with a trace of *idiot*, and vice versa, as if loath to suggest that doltishness should ever go unrewarded, or genius unpunished. The scene of Nash's insulin injection, a modish cure of the time, may be upsettingly accurate, but you can't help feeling that the film is aroused by his paranoia, and there are far too many men wandering around in big dark cars and matching hats. Mind you, most of these fantasies were dreamed up by the screenwriter Akiva Goldsman, who also scripted "Batman and Robin" and "Lost in Space," so we should be thankful that "A Beautiful Mind" makes even a particle of sense.

Russell Crowe gives the kind of performance that sends a thrill up the spines of Academy voters, and the film is in no mood to let us forget it. When the same actor played Maximus, in "Gladiator," the question of his beautiful mind never arose, at least half the audience being more concerned with how much beautiful body he could pack inside a breastplate; he lived within the part, and we, in turn, were content to live the story through him, whereas Nash is such a tight, recalcitrant being that Crowe's efforts to break into him never really bear us along. Crowe astounds with his technical skill—the organ-deep murmur of the West Virginian voice, the rubbing of palm against brow as if to wipe it clean of besmirching thought—and yet I felt almost embarrassed to see him return to the hassled complexity that he explored in "The Insider." Crowe is now an officially designated hunk, whether he likes it or not. Blame the bigotry of our natural taste, but the history of cinema owes more to brooding hunks than to cracked eggheads, and we simply find it hard to watch the strong play the weak.

Many people gave up on John Nash or veered away from him; the place that emerges most honorably from the movie is Princeton, which encouraged someone who had flourished within its precincts to return, much later, as a borderline hobo in a knit hat, and to sit in the library for years while something in his cavernous and ruined brain began to heal. For that is the gag at the back of Howard's film: the wildest of wishful thinkings turns out to be true. John Nash did partly recover, and he did not, as was feared, disgrace himself at the Nobel ceremony. On the other hand, Sylvia Nasar does not quote his acceptance speech, and we must take it on trust from Ron Howard that Nash did indeed go all gloopy on the Swedes and start rabbiting on about "the mysterious equations of love."

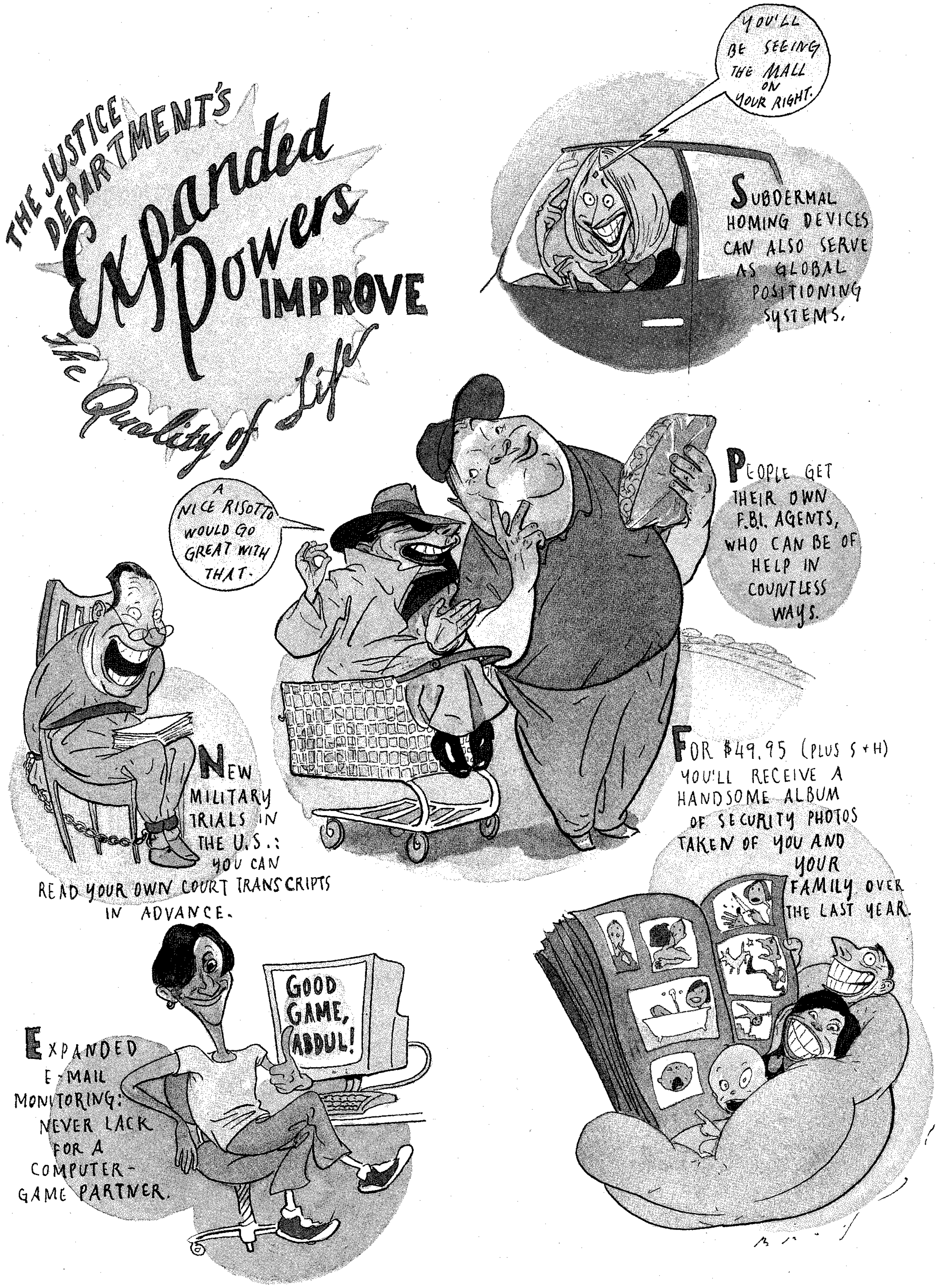
Still, if anybody gives one license to rabbit, it is Jennifer Connelly, an actress guaranteed to twitch a million tails. Since her transfixing début, in "Once Upon a Time in America," she has enjoyed a quiet and steady career, although you can't help thinking that forty years ago her rise would have been noisy and vertiginous. Ed Harris, who is reunited with her in "A Beautiful Mind," cast her as a late love in "Pollock," and she is alarmingly right for both roles; sometimes a period part serves to accentuate an actor's period bearing, and Connelly has both an interior coolness and an external outline that cinema barely knows what to do with anymore. She is the best thing about the new film; she both calms it down and sexes it up, and—together with the endearing Paul Bettany, who plays Nash's British roommate at Princeton—she manages to chip away at the earnestness of Howard's project. That is the problem with "A Beautiful Mind": not that it misrepresents the facts but that it digs so strenuously for redemption in a tough and bitter tale. Howard offers yet another homage to the triumph of the human spirit, whereas John Nash is a case study in the travails of a none too human mind. His gifts remain beyond our reckoning, and his sufferings were not beautiful at all. ♦

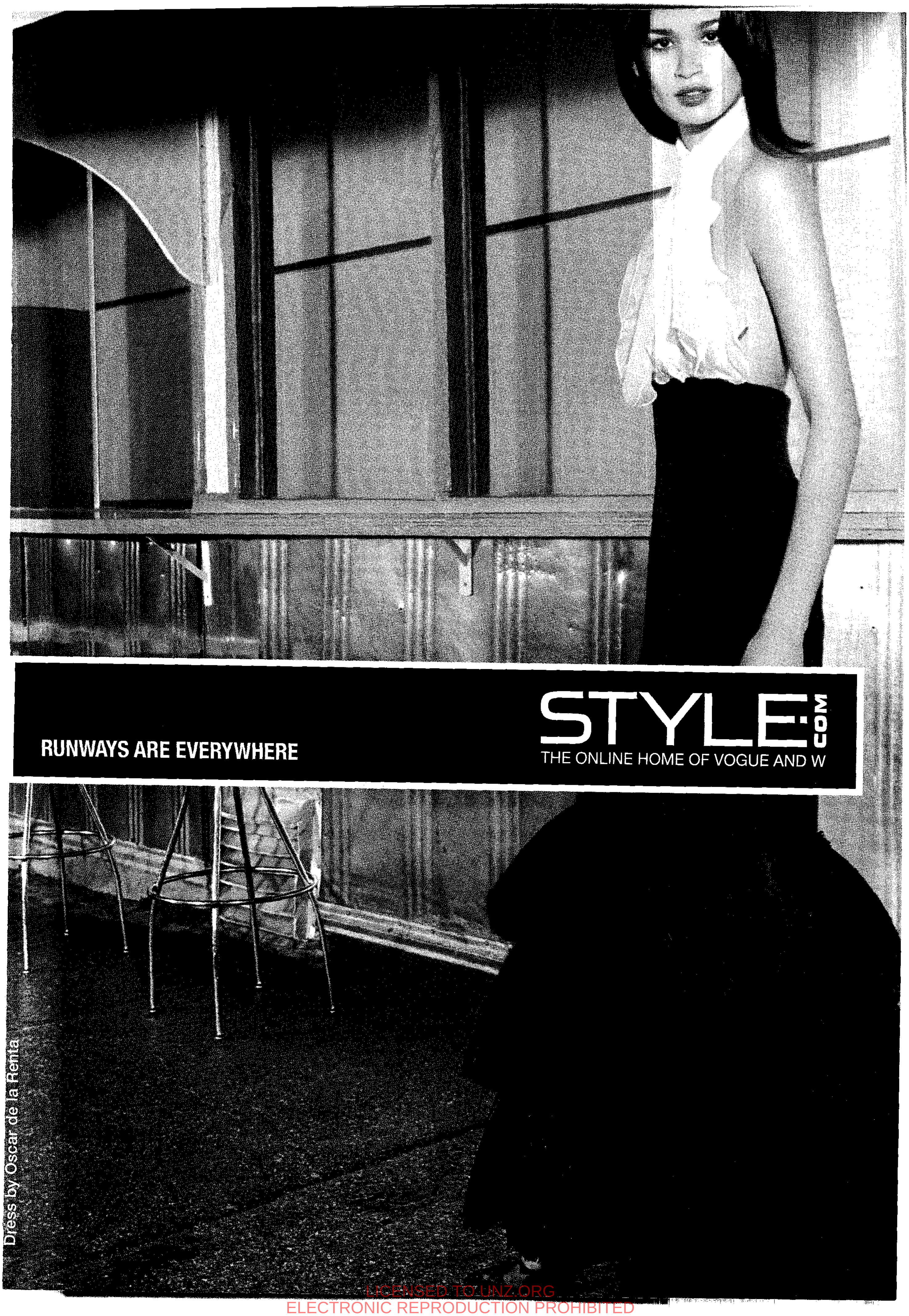


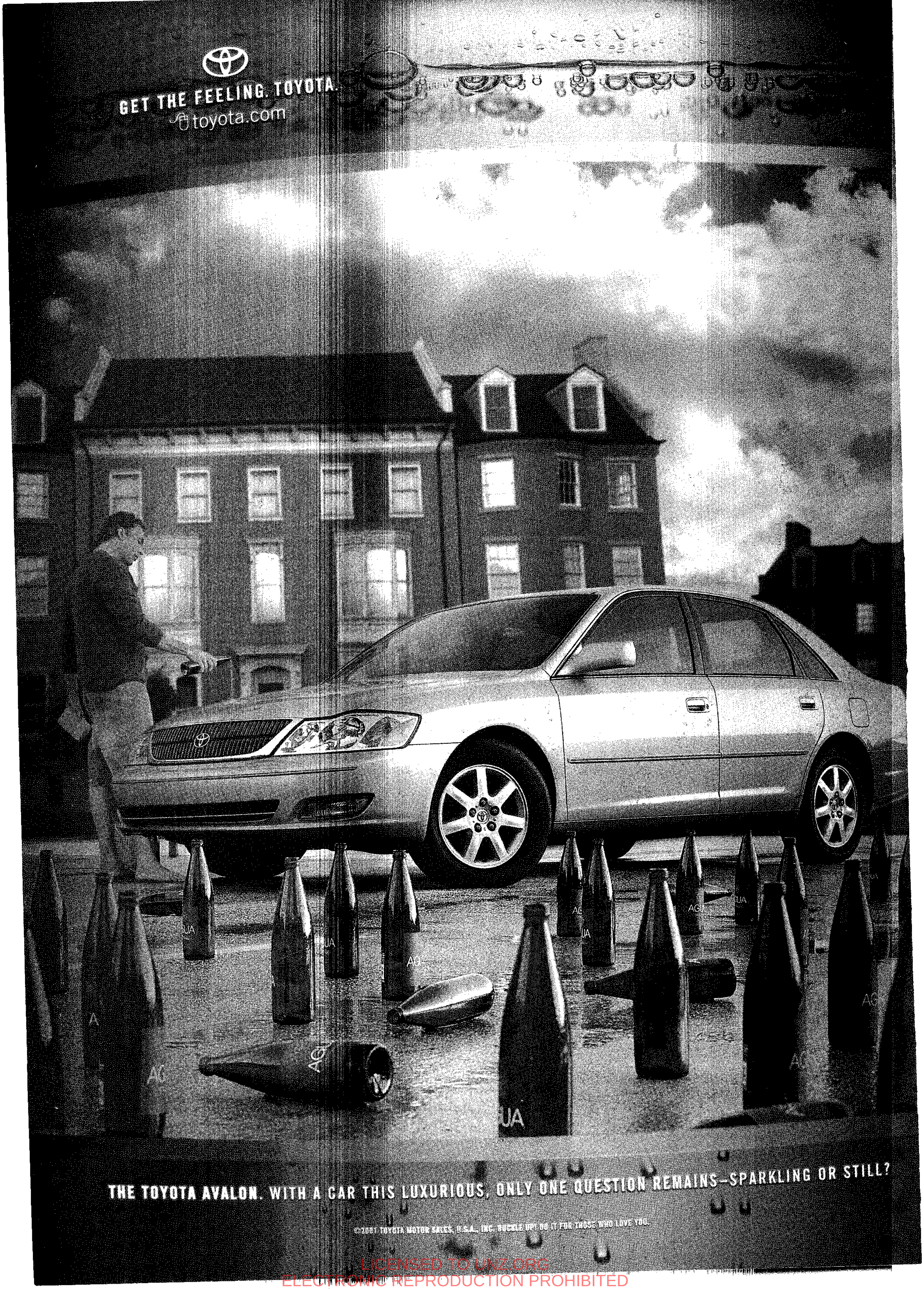
Crowe and Jennifer Connelly in Ron Howard's "A Beautiful Mind."

ROBERT RISKO

THE BACK PAGE BY STEVE BRODNER


THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT'S Expanded Powers IMPROVE the Quality of Life
YOU'LL BE SEEING THE MALL ON YOUR RIGHT.
SUBDERMAL HOMING DEVICES CAN ALSO SERVE AS GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEMS.
A NICE RISOTTO WOULD GO GREAT WITH THAT.
PEOPLE GET THEIR OWN F.B.I. AGENTS, WHO CAN BE OF HELP IN COUNTLESS WAYS.
NEW MILITARY TRIALS IN THE U.S.: YOU CAN READ YOUR OWN COURT TRANSCRIPTS IN ADVANCE.
FOR $49.95 (PLUS S+H) YOU'LL RECEIVE A HANDSOME ALBUM OF SECURITY PHOTOS TAKEN OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY OVER THE LAST YEAR.
GOOD GAME, ABDUL!
EXPANDED E-MAIL MONITORING: NEVER LACK FOR A COMPUTER-GAME PARTNER.


Dress by Oscar de la Renta
RUNWAYS ARE EVERYWHERE
STYLE.COM
THE ONLINE HOME OF VOGUE AND W


GET THE FEELING. TOYOTA.
toyota.com
THE TOYOTA AVALON. WITH A CAR THIS LUXURIOUS, ONLY ONE QUESTION REMAINS–SPARKLING OR STILL?
©2001 TOYOTA MOTOR SALES, U.S.A., INC. BUCKLE UP! DO IT FOR THOSE WHO LOVE YOU.